The Correlation Between Students' Motivation to Study and Their Individual Listening to English

Abstract

This paper investigates listening comprehension and motivation. It is composed of a theoretical aspect and a practical one. In the theoretical aspect, it first defines listening, putting a special emphasis on its nature as well as the problems encountered by L2 learners, notably individual L2 listeners in English. Motivation is then introduced and defined. It will be shown how motivation represents a key element in learning and achievement. At last, intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation are compared, focusing particularly on the main differences between them. In the practical aspect, the link between listening and motivation is investigated by means of two questions in the questionnaire. It has been shown that extrinsically motivated students, who represent a majority, do not actually listen regularly to English outside their classes- an intrinsically motivated behaviour. Thus listening and motivation have proved that they could be paired up together.

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Introduction

New discoveries and findings in the field of research in education have set the ground for new insights in language learning and language teaching. Undoubtedly, educationalists are taking advantage of this wide range of possibilities to understand better both learners and teachers.

This paper investigates two seemingly separate fields which are listening and motivation but which are in actual fact deeply related. The study checks the correlation between students' motivation and their individual listening and examines the significant links. The experimental aspect is approached by means of a questionnaire.

ملخص

يهدف هذا المقال إلى الكشف عن العلاقة الممكنة بين السمع والدافعية. وينقسم إلى قسمين رئيسيين : نظري تطبيقي.يعرف في القسم النظري السمع مركزا على العوائق التي تعترض الطلبة في فهم اللغة الإنجليزية عندما يستمعون إليها عبر التلفاز أو المذياع، ثم يتطرق إلى تعريف الدافعية ودورها في عملية التعلم

والتحصيل، وأخيرا يقارن بين الدافعية الداخلية والدافعية الخارجية. أما القسم التطبيقي فيكشف عن العلاقة بين السمع والدافعية. لقد أوضحت نتائج الدراسة أن الطلبة الذين لديهم دافعية خارجية، والذين يمثلون الأغلبية في العينة المدروسة لا يستمعون إلى الإنجليزية بقسط كاف خارج الإطار الجامعي.

1. The Theoretical Aspect
1.1. Definitions and Approaches to Listening Comprehension

Listening comprehension can be defined as simply the ability to understand language used by native speakers. This definition is proposed by Mendelssohn:

"The ability to understand the spoken language of native speakers." (1984, p.64)

Although this definition which may just be taken as a starting point and which appears a bit too simple and too general, it seems, however, to depart from the procedures of the audio-lingual method (mainly to listen and repeat). Another definition is proposed by O'Malley *et al*:

"The listener constructs meaning by using cues from contextual information and from existing knowledge, while relying upon multiple strategic resources to fulfil the task requirements." (1989, p.434)

This definition is extensive and inclusive of several elements involved in the act of listening. It involves the idea of active and conscious process. This means that the listener is active and conscious. In addition to this, the listener builds expectations on the basis of contextual clues and world knowledge by the use of different strategies. Yet, one element seems to be lacking here- notably schema. For the explanation of schema, let's give another definition of listening which includes schema. This definition has been put forward by Byrnes. He writes:

"Schema-based understanding, i.e., information stored in long-term memory as frames or scripts which directs the comprehension process." (1984, p. 319).

So, and on the basis of these definitions, we can say that listening comprehension in L2 (second or foreign language) involves exposure to L2 but with comprehension based on several factors such as schemata, active processing, etc. In a word, discourse knowledge, contextual clues, and world knowledge are necessary in listening comprehension.

Listening in L1 and L2

Research has shown that if listening in L1 and L2 seem to be similar in their basic mechanisms, there exist, however, big differences in terms of comprehension and processing on the part of learners.

1.1.1.1. Listening in L1

The process of comprehension is said to start before we are even born. According to Flowerdew and Miller, babies who listened to stories before they were born would recognize and attend to such stories rather than other stories when they were born (2005. p. 21). This implies that foetuses listen to familiar sounds (mothers' speech) before they are born.

1.1.1.2. Problems Encountered in L2 listening

Whereas L1 listeners are constantly exposed to their native language, L2 listeners are not so privileged. In L2 situations, attending becomes part of the active learning process. Let's go through some complex pronunciation problems which make L2 listening difficult, particularly, in English, in our case.

1.1.1.2.1. Fast Speech (speed of delivery)

Listening comprehension develops with pronunciation training because the two skills are interrelated: two aspects of the same communicative system in English. Bowen has discussed this issue emphasizing that students must be able to understand native pronunciation without a special help. He writes:

"Of course the student must be capable of understanding native pronunciation under normal circumstances of production and not require of his interlocutors a special style for his personal use." (1972, p.85)

1.1.1.2.2. Weak Forms.

Another serious difficulty concerns weak forms. Weak forms basically involve the weakening of some vowels in unstressed syllables to move to the centre of the mouth to be pronounced as schwa. For example, in connected speech, the following string of words is pronounced like this: 'Tell them it's not at all ready'. First, the vowel [e] in the word 'them' is pronounced schwa. Second, in the word 'at' the short [a] is turned to schwa again. A high frequency of such weak forms in rapid speech makes L2 comprehension rather arduous.

1.1.1.2.3. Elision

Elision has been defined by G. Brown as:

"The missing out of a consonant or a vowel". (1990, p. 66)

According to this definition, elision represents the disappearance of a vowel or a consonant, certainly for the sake of ease of pronunciation of rapid speech. For example, 'the needs of the people' becomes 'the nees of the people'. So, the [d] sound has totally disappeared. Unfortunately, L2 listeners who are not yet proficient enough with L2 listening, do face big difficulties to recognize such alterations and fail to grasp the meaning of the message.

1.1.1.2.4. Assimilation

It is usually the change of place of articulation of final consonants of a word under the influence of initial consonants of following word. For example, in the sentences below, we will see how some consonants change their place of articulation:

a. 'because you have a plenty of time'. In the first word 'because', the last sound which is [z] whose place of articulation is alveolar changes to [ ] which is palato-alveolar under the influence of the first sound of next word 'you' which starts with [j].

1.1.1.2.5. Stress and Rhythm

Unlike other languages where stress always falls on the same syllable (Arabic on the first syllable, French on the last syllable, etc.), English has a rather moving stress. Stressed syllables as defined by G. Brown (ibid, p.54) represent syllables which are louder, longer, more prominent in pitch and clearly articulated. In addition to this,

G. Brown (1977, p.45) argues that length seems to be the variable that most L2 learners easily recognize whereas the other variables tend to be more difficult to control. As for rhythm, it is related to stressed and unstressed syllables. Standard English is said to be one of those languages that tends toward a stress-timed rhythm. According to Flowerdew and Miller:

"In stress-timed languages like English, the unstressed words tend to be spoken more quickly between the stressed words, in order to maintain the overall rhythm." (op.cit, p. 32)

This means that whatever the number of unstressed syllables between stressed ones, time will be the same. Unfortunately again, it is hard for L2 listeners to anticipate in that way unless they are trained.

1.1.1.2.6. Intonation

Intonation may be defined as related to the variation of the pitch of the voice of the speaker. This definition has been proposed by Brown:

"The variation in the direction of the pitch of the voice of the speaker."

Although intonation plays a central role in the communication of meaning, it is unfortunately often neglected. This neglect may be due to the inherent complexity of intonation. In any case, simple or complex, as intonation is important for comprehension, it deserves to be given more importance and to be taught more adequately.

1.2. Some Definitions and Approaches to Motivation

The definitions of motivation are numerous and diverse. Below are just but few attempts to highlight some definitions of motivation made by some specialists in the field of psychology, motivation, education, and English Language Teaching.

Let's start with this definition- one that has often been proposed by many writers; it actually refers to the etymology of the term motivation. Pintrich *et al*, write:

"The term motivation is derived from the Latin word *movere* (to move)". (2002, p. 5)

This definition emphasizes the idea of movement and power that drive human behaviour towards action. Another definition is proposed by Vallerand *et al* who argue that it is difficult to define the concept of motivation accurately...They go on and wonder about this force that influences human behaviour (1993, p. 17). Here the focus is on those hidden forces that make us act.

A third definition that has been chosen in this paper concerns Deci and Ryan who stress both internal and external processes with a special emphasis on action made towards needs. So the term "needs" is crucial in their conception of the meaning of motivation. They write:

"The exploration of the energization and direction of behaviour which concerns energy in motivation theory is a matter of needs. Direction in motivation theory concerns the processes and structures of the organism that give meaning to internal and external stimuli, thereby directing action toward the satisfaction of needs". (1985, p. 3)

Simply stated, then, the field of motivation explores all aspects of an organism's needs and the processes and structures that relate those needs to behaviour.

The last definition used in this paper is made by Weiner. He believes that in the study of motivation we must include:

"[T]riggering, direction, intensity, and persistence of a behaviour directed towards a goal." (1992, p.1)

This definition takes account of internal and external processes as well as the moment motivation starts, its direction, its intensity, and its persistence. Stated differently, this definition somehow adds a new element which is persistence. It seems important to know why some behaviour persists whereas others do not.

So, on the basis of all these definitions, it can be argued that motivation plays a crucial role in prompting our acts and behaviours. Furthermore, in the field of education, it is clear that achievement, success, and failure are at least partly contingent upon it.

1.2.1.   Main Differences Between Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

1.2.1.1. **Intrinsic Motivation:** Intrinsic motivation implies engaging in an activity for the pleasure and satisfaction inherent in the activity. Students who do their homework because they enjoy doing it and find that learning new things is interesting and satisfying, are said to be intrinsically motivated. Reeve, Deci, and Ryan write:

> "Intrinsic motivation is the innate motivation that emerges spontaneously from psychological needs, and is manifest as being interested in the activity itself." (2004, p.38)

1.2.1.2. **Extrinsic Motivation**: In contrast to intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation refers to a broad array of behaviours. Vallerand and Ratelle say:

> "Behaviours [have] in common the fact that activities are engaged in not for reasons inherent in them but for instrumental reasons." (2002, p.42)

This simply means that extrinsically motivated behaviours and/or choices are undertaken to attain an end state that is separate from the actual behaviour or actual choice.

2.   Investigating the correlation between students' motivation to study and their individual listening

2.1. Methodology

In this paper, the methodology used is an analysis of the results of a questionnaire as well as significant correlations between the results of two questions. The questions analysed in this paper are picked up from the pilot study of the questionnaire about listening used in the doctoral research. The questionnaire in question consists of twenty five questions, out of which, two questions have been picked up. The two questions are:

a.   Part 1: General Information
Question10: What is your favourite pastime?

b.   Part 2: Listening, Teaching and Motivation
   Question2: Why did you choose to study English at the university? You circle the
option corresponding to your choice. You can choose more than one option at a time.
a)   Future career   b) You like English very much   c) Other

2.2. The Population
The population of this paper concerns second-year LMD students, department of
English, faculty of literature and languages, university of Constantine. Sampling was
made so as to reduce the population to a manageable proportion, using the criteria for
selecting a representative sample. All in all, ninety seven questionnaires have been
collected and analyzed. The total number of groups in the second-year is thirteen, out
of which three groups have been selected randomly. The conditions of administration
of the questionnaire were optimal, since students were gathered in a classroom, given
instructions in a relaxed atmosphere, and given enough time to fill in, away from any
sort of discomfort, pressure or bias.

2.3.   A Qualitative Analysis of the Results of the Questionnaire
As it is explained above, this question (why did you choose to study English at the
university?) is meant to determine students' type of motivation (intrinsic or extrinsic).
Basically, it is rather intrinsic motivation that is earnestly sought because it is said to
have good effects on sustained effort, achievements, and creativity. Let's see how our
students answered and how their answers can be interpreted. The results indicate that
70 students chose option (a) "future career"; 20 students chose option (b) "you like
English very much; the remainder chose the option other.
 What do such results point to? They show that a high majority of students are rather
motivated extrinsically. 70 out of 97 represent a high majority. This simply means that
many students have chosen English not because they like it but because they think it is
profitable. The effects on learning, effort, and achievement are certainly negative.
What are the reasons which have pushed most students to choose this extrinsic motive?
When we take a quick look at how society is built up, such results are no surprise. As
people are getting more and more materialistic (only the material benefit is valued), it
is no surprise that this damaging state of mind affects all aspects of life, education
included. When further correlations are made, we will see whether such students listen
to English individually (an intrinsic behaviour).
The number of students who chose option (b) (you like English very much) and who
may be said to be motivated intrinsically is only 20 out of 97. The number, as it
appears, is quite insignificant. The reasons are again those mentioned above. On the
basis of these results, it can be argued that most students are motivated extrinsically,
and very few are motivated intrinsically.
The second point is to gauge whether students listen individually or not. The results
indicate that 47 students said they listened and 50 said they didn't. These results
indicate that there are no significant differences. However, when correlations with the
first question are made, we will see if the results are the same.

Now let's move to the significant correlation. Do students who chose the option 'future career', i.e., motivated extrinsically, listen individually or not? The results show that out of the 70 students who chose the option future career (motivated extrinsically), 25 said they listened and 45 said they didn't.

The above results show that most students who are extrinsically motivated do not really listen to English individually enough. The explanation of this situation lies again in the in fact that such students were presumably influenced by the external gain their choice of English would bring. Consequently, they perhaps never chose English for its own sake. All this mau unfortunately have a negative effect on their interest in studies and their personal commitment illustrated by their personal effort to listen individually and progress.

Now, let's see whether the students who chose option (b), i.e., intrinsic motive, listened individually or not. It is true that 20 students out of 97 is a very small number but for the sake of the question of this paper, let's just check. In fact, out of 20 students, 17 said they listened and 3 said they didn't. What does all this mean? It simply means that the most intrinsically motivated students do make extra efforts to reinforce their learning by individual listening. They probably do it wholeheartedly because their primary purpose is to learn English and not to use it as a means to achieve instrumental gains, future job in our case.

Conclusion

As a conclusion to this paper, it can be argued that intrinsic motivation and individual listening can be paired up together. The results have revealed significant links in this field, and in the field of learning in general.

The theoretical aspect has tackled listening from several different angles so as to set the ground for the practical one. In the theoretical aspect, listening has been introduced and investigated. It has been shown that listening in L2 is considered more difficult than listening in L1. Motivation has also been introduced in this paper. After few attempts to define it, intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation have been briefly compared and contrasted.

In the practical aspect, the links between listening comprehension and motivation have been discussed. It has been shown that students' type of motivation for studies can have an impact on their individual effort to learn and persevere.

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