

Listening Strategy — Theory and Practice

英语听力策略论

——理论与实践



贺梦依 著
Matt Swain 审读

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图书在版编目(CIP)数据

英语听力策略论:理论与实践/贺梦依著. —重庆:西南师范大学出版社, 2007. 6
ISBN 978-7-5621-3886-0

I. 英... II. 贺... III. 英语—听说教学—教学研究
IV. H319.9

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2007)第 089488 号

英语听力策略论:理论与实践

著 者:贺梦依

责任编辑:廖 伟

美术设计:张 宏

出 版:西南师范大学出版社出版、发行

网址:www.xscbs.com

重庆·北碚 邮编:400715

印 刷:西南政法大学印刷厂

开 本:889mm×1194mm 1/32

印 张:7

插 页:2

字 数:300 千字

版 次:2007 年 7 月第 1 版

印 次:2007 年 7 月第 1 次印刷

书 号:ISBN 978-7-5621-3886-0

定 价:15.00 元

前言

近年来,在我国英语学术界,英语听力能力的培养越来越为广大外语教师和学习者所关注。研究者们对如何提高学生的听力能力做了不少的研究。听力理解被视为是听音者积极的、创造性的构建意义的综合过程,而不只是被动的接受知识。影响听力能力的因素有许多,例如动机、记忆力、焦虑感、语言水平、背景知识和听力策略等。其中,听力策略在听力学习中发挥着非常重要的作用,它可以帮助听音者控制整个听音过程,联系新旧知识。

但是,什么是听力策略,听力策略包括哪些方面的内容,学生经常运用哪些策略来帮助解决听力学习中碰到的困难,策略培训是否对提高听力水平有效等等,相关的具有系统性的研究教较少,尤其是在国内。本书在回顾国内外学术界学习策略和听力学习研究的基础上,以 O'Malley 和 Chamot 的学习策略理论为框架,并结合 Oxford 和文秋芳的部分学习策略,通过采用描述性研究与实验研究相结合、理论与实践相结合的方法,尝试着全面地、系统地就英语听力学习策略做一探索性研究。

全书共由九章组成。第一章就研究的背景及其意义做一简要介绍。第二章从年龄、智商、学习态度和动机、学习风格、学生性格、学习策略等方面探讨了影响学习的各种因素。第三章介绍了学习策略的定义、分类及其如何作用于学习各过程。在此基础上归纳了一套适合听力学习的听力策略。第四章通过讨论听力的定义、特征、过程、分类以及听力材料,表明为了提高听力水平就必须培养两种能力:语言知识和听力策略。第五章探讨的核心问题是学生在听力学习中遇到的困难,通过问卷调查发现:英语专业和非英语专业的学生在听力学习中分别遇到了诸如语音、语调、词汇、语速、听力策略等六十六种和六十七种困难。本书第六章和第七章是从老师和学生两个角度出发,就听力策略的教学和

运用展开了调查和探讨。主要包括学生听力策略运用的总体情况；听力策略与学习专业、性别、英语水平的关系；教师教授听力策略的总体情况；以及学生使用策略与教师教授策略情况的对比研究。第八章是在第七章研究结果的基础上对听力策略培训与听力成绩的关系进行了实验论证。第九章是结论。

听力策略的研究是一个相当复杂的研究课题，它涉及到教育学、心理学、语言学、社会学等各个领域的研究，本书也只是对听力策略的初步探讨。由于作者水平的限制，研究的深度和广度都有限。在此，希望专家和读者对本书提出批评和建议。

贺梦依

2007年3月

Chapter One Introduction	1
Chapter Two Learner Factors Affecting Learning Outcomes	
2.1 Age	5
2.2 Intelligence and Aptitude	9
2.3 Attitude and Motivation	12
2.4 Cognitive Styles	15
2.5 Personality	17
2.6 Learning Strategies	21
Summary	23
Chapter Three Learning Strategies	
3.1 Definition of Learning Strategies	25
3.2 Types of Learning Strategies	29
3.3 How Learning Strategies Exert Their Influence on Learning Process	34
Summary	36
Chapter Four Theories of Listening Comprehension	
4.1 The Definition of Listening Comprehension	37
4.2 The Features of Listening Comprehension	38
4.3 The Process of Listening Comprehension	40
4.4 The Classification of Listening Comprehension	47

4.5 Listening Materials	48
-------------------------------	----

Summary	56
---------------	----

Chapter Five Listening Problems Confronting Learners

5.1 Some Factors and the Related Strategies in Theory	57
---	----

5.2 The Reported Problems Confronting Listeners in Practice	66
---	----

Summary	77
---------------	----

Chapter Six Literature Review and Research Methods

6.1 Research Review	79
---------------------------	----

6.2 Method and Objectives	90
---------------------------------	----

6.3 Subjects	92
--------------------	----

6.4 Instruments	93
-----------------------	----

6.5 Data Collection and Analysis Process	95
--	----

Summary.....	96
--------------	----

Chapter Seven Data Analysis and Discussion

7.1 Students'Attitude towards English Learning and Listening Strategies	97
---	----

7.2 Overall Strategy Use by Students	99
--	----

7.3 Strategy Use by University Major	110
--	-----

7.4 Strategy Use by Gender.....	125
---------------------------------	-----

7.6 Listening Strategies Instruction by Teachers	140
7.7 Comparison between Students and Teachers in Listening Strategy Use and Instruction	146
Summary	151

Chapter Eight The Effect of Listening Strategy Instruction on Listening Comprehension

8.1 Significance of the Study	152
8.2 Research Methodology	154
8.3 Results	164
8.4 Discussion	171
Summary	175

Chapter Nine Conclusions

9.1 Conclusions	176
9.2 Implications	178
9.3 Limitations	180
Bibliography	181
Appendix	194

Chapter One Introduction

The development of new information technologies challenges traditional modes of information transmission and reception. Historic changes are shaping the creation of a new information-economy era. As Halliday (2003) noted, there has been a "...shift from a goods and services economy to an information economy." The mass media's expansion and the quickening pace of life are shifting information reception from the eye and the printed page to the ear and the mouth. Today English is one of most important media for information transmission. English has become an international language. Consequently, the demand in modern societies is greater for the listening comprehension on the part of English learners, one of the four skills that constitute the language proficiency.

In addition, listening is the most basic skill in our language development. It is the first language mode that children acquire, and it provides the basis for the other language arts (Lundsteen, 1979). The ability to speak, read and write depends on one's ability to listen. As Rost (1994) pointed out, "Listening is vital in the language classroom because it provides input for the learner. Without understanding input at the right level, learning cannot begin."

Globalization and the institutional developments in Chinese foreign language education programs have accelerated interest in oracy, the ability to understand and participate in spoken communication. According to the College English Curriculum Requirements (2004), the objective of College English is to develop students' ability to use English in an all-round way, especially listening and speaking. Consequently, developing students' listening ability in English teaching has risen to a top priority.

Most college students' listening ability is weak compared to other language skills such as reading. This, to some extent, is related to the fact that a balanced instructional emphasis on the development of all skill modes has been slight. Listening is the "orphan" of the language arts. Some educators and

learners assume that the development of the skill of listening will come about automatically if other skills are improved to a desirable level, therefore, classroom instruction is unnecessary. In addition, the scarcity of authentic listening materials has also contributed to the poor listening ability of the college students.

What can be done to improve the ability of a student to listen and comprehend? Let's define listening as a set of processes in which learners construct the meaning of the utterance of spoken text within the creative mental activity. The objective of a listener is to understand what the speaker conveys. However, even if a student can catch every word of the message, they often can not thoroughly understand a spoken text. This is because the ability to understand linguistic message is not simply a function of "knowledge of language." Language comprehension requires a listener to possess relevant knowledge to fill in the gaps in messages. Indeed, the ability to link new information is so necessary for comprehension that it can be seen as a main factor in distinguishing the successful learners from less successful learners. Such an ability that does affect listening comprehension is to some extent, regarded as one kind of learning strategies. According to O'Malley & Chamot(1990), learning strategies can be defined as the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information. To improve listening comprehension it is necessary to develop two objectives: linguistic competence and listening strategies. Listeners who can't develop either of them are likely to produce unsatisfactory results. The most significant goal of a teacher is not merely to teach the students how to decode symbols from the phonological medium, but to cultivate their ability to listen. The ability to listen is as important as the acquisition of knowledge for a college student. As Richards (1983) suggested, "In teaching listening comprehension we can manipulate two variables, both of which serve to develop ability in particular skill areas. We can either manipulate the input, or we can manipulate the tasks we set for the learner. Manipulation of either is directed toward developing particular listening skills"(see Figure 1). Skills/ strategies that empower the learner to control the process of language comprehension help link the new information



with prior knowledge.

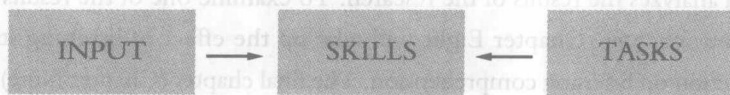


Figure 1

In consideration of the importance of learning strategies, both in the West and in China, researchers have elucidated the type of learning strategies which appear to be related to the success in language learning (Rubin, 1975, 1987; Brown, 1980; Oxford, 1987, 1989, 1990; O'Malley & Chamot, 1985, 1987, 1989, 1990; Cohen, 1995, 1996, 2000; Wen Qiufang, 1995, 1996, 2003; Su Yunlian, 2002, 2003; Yang Jianding, 2002). The results show that learners benefit from explicit strategy training. However, the majority of work on learning strategies in the developmental literature focused only on activities such as reading, writing, and word skills. Little attention is paid to listening skills, especially in China. Hence, the aim of this book is to explore listening strategies to help teachers to improve their teaching and students to enhance their listening ability.

This book consists of nine parts. This chapter (Chapter One) is an introduction which briefly accounts for the background and the significance of this book. Chapter Two will be devoted to discussing the factors affecting learning outcomes in terms of Age, Intelligence and Aptitude, Attitude and Motivation, Cognitive styles, Personality, Learning strategies and so on. In Chapter Three, theories on learning strategies are presented in detail. The author follows O'Malley & Chamot's (1990) framework as a blueprint and adopts some specific strategies from Oxford (1990) system. Chapter Four concerns itself with theories on listening comprehension. In order to pave the way for the actual discussion of learning strategies, I shall devote one chapter to examining the problems confronting learners (Chapter Five). Chapter Six and Chapter Seven cover the research of listening strategies adopted/taught by students and teachers. Chapter Six presents the previous studies abroad and at home and describes the

research and the detailed procedures of the strategy investigation. Chapter Seven analyzes the results of the research. To examine one of the results in the previous chapter, Chapter Eight will take up the effect of listening strategy instruction on listening comprehension. The final chapter (Chapter Nine) draws tentative conclusions before the implications for listening learning and teaching are put forward along with suggestions for future research.



Chapter Two

Learner Factors Affecting Learning Outcomes

Much research has been done on pedagogical approaches to language acquisition in the past decades with heavy emphasis on language teaching. But it is not difficult to find that whatever teaching methodology is adopted, there are always good language learners and slow ones. In fact, throughout the process of language development, learning is what really matters while teaching is just a way of helping it along. Nunan(1995) argues that, "it is the learner who must remain at the center of the process, for no matter how much energy and effort we expend, it is the learner who has to do the learning." So in recent years, researchers have shifted their focus from language instruction to language learning.

This chapter will examine the learner factors which contribute to language learning. The learner factors may be potentially numerous and defy any attempts at a classification. Therefore, we will examine six general factors that we believe are of great importance in language learning: age, intelligence and aptitude, attitude and motivation, cognitive styles, personality, learning strategies. Before the discussion, let me make a distinction between acquisition and learning. According to Krashen(1982), "acquisition" refers to picking up a second language through exposure, whereas "learning" refers to the conscious study of a second language. However, Ellis (1994) argued that the distinction between the two concepts is worth further research. In this book, we shall use "acquisition" and "learning" interchangeably, irrespective of whether conscious or subconscious processes are involved.

2.1 Age

Age has often been considered a major, if not the primary, factor determining success in learning a second/foreign language. It is a popular belief that

children are better language learners than adults. There are a number of comprehensive reviews of the SLA literature dealing with age (Hatch, 1983a; Stern, 1983; Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982); however, there is also a noticeable lack of agreement in the conclusions reached by these authors.

Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle (1978) claimed that it may be the adolescent who progresses most rapidly. They implemented their study on Dutch L2 learner and found that although the adult (15 years and older) outperformed the child (6 to 10 years), the teenager (12 to 15 years) learned more rapidly than both. It would appear that although age improves language learning capacity, performance may peak in the teens, after which performance declines.

Oyama (1976) investigated 60 Italian male immigrants in the USA with an attempt to find the effect of the age on pronunciation. His finding is that younger learners do better. Fathman (1975) also arrived at a similar conclusion as far as pronunciation is concerned. But in the area of morphology and syntax, older children outperformed the younger. Researchers have shown the differences in language learning between adult and child in one way or another. Bearing on the question whether child is better than adult at learning, Swain (1981) conducted a study with an attempt to find out the relative advantage of early and late starts to immersion programmes in Canada. Swain was still surprised to find that late immersion learner had many better results than early immersion learner although Ervin-Tripp (1974) showed the result that older child learns certain aspects of language more effectively than younger one, that is, being young is no more an advantage in language learning than in many other aspects of life.

Based on the empirical findings presented so far, it is very clear that the controversy of the effect of age on language learning is irreconcilable. Thus it is necessary to apply some theoretical hypothesis to explain these phenomena. There are four types of hypotheses to be considered: the biological, the cognitive development, the affective, and the environment. Penfield and Roberts (Ellis, 1985) proposed a critical period hypothesis, which argues that the optimum age for language acquisition falls within the first ten years of life. Such

a statement won support from Lenneberg (Ellis, 1985). During the critical period, the brain retains its plasticity, but with the onset of puberty, this plasticity begins to disappear. They suggested that this was the result of the lateralization of the language function in the left hemisphere of the brain. After puberty, languages have to be taught and learned through conscious and painstaking efforts and a foreign accent can not be overcome easily. However the critical hypothesis was partially correct only as far as pronunciation is concerned. In other words, an early learner has an advantage of sounding more native. Lamendella (Spolshy, 1989), one of the most optimistic scholars in the psycholinguistic field, asserts that primary language learning takes advantage of an innate system, which is available up to the critical period — a hypothetical age at which the language acquisition device no longer operates, after which second language acquisition is still possible, but only using somewhat different systems.

From the cognitive point of view, there exists obvious difference between the young child and the adolescent or adult. The adult has the ability to learn a language by consciously studying linguistic rules; they comprehend language as a formal system. In contrast, the younger child lacks the awareness that language is a system, and only cares about language function or expressing meaning, and just learns the language naturally and automatically. As Halliday (1973) pointed out, the young child responds not so much to what language is as to what language does. Put in another way, young child lacks the ability of meta-cognition. Meta-cognition is a term that is now widely used to refer to the knowledge and control the learner has of their own cognitive processes. Just as Alexander and Murphy (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990) noted: "the ability to reflect and regulate one's thoughts and behaviors (meta-cognition) is essential to learning and development." Based on the theory of the cognitive development, we can also explain why adolescents learn more rapidly than both children and adults. It is obvious that not only can the adolescents "pick up" language like a child, but they can supplement this process by conscious study. In addition, adolescents may also have better memories than adults, a

condition which play a significant role in language learning.

In order to elaborate the relationship between age and language learning, Brown (1980) proposed that second language acquisition (SLA) is related to four stages of acculturation: initial excitement and euphoria; culture shock; culture stress; assimilation. Young children are seen as socio-culturally resilient, because they are less culture-bound than adults. Also Neufeld (1978) provided an account in terms of affective factors. He distinguishes “primary” and “secondary” levels of language. Primary levels include a reasonably large functional vocabulary and basic mastery of pronunciation and grammatical rules. Secondary levels include the ability to handle complex grammatical structures and different language styles. Neufeld claimed that all learners have an innate ability to acquire primary levels. However, children are more likely to achieve secondary levels than adults because they are much more strongly motivated by the need to be accepted by their peer groups. On the other hand, adults, due to their age status, may have fewer opportunities to develop their pragmatic ability, as we know that language learning is always socially contextualized and often co-constructed.

Furthermore, the environment is another important factor affecting the learning ability of children and older learners. In the majority cases, children have better learning conditions than older learners: more time, attention, communicative need, opportunities for use, and so on. It is our tentative idea that in an attempt to make a fairer comparison, it is necessary to compare learners who have similar opportunities.

These biological, cognitive, affective explanations and environmental situation may be combined to account for the effects of age on language learning. In the analysis of age factor, we are surprised that something that is sometimes thought to be simple turns out to be much more complex on closer examination. The notion that young children pick up second languages more easily than older learners is clearly challenged by evidence of areas in which the latter does better. The question that needs to be asked is thus not whether older or younger learners do better, but rather what goals are suitable at various ages and what

conditions lead to greater success in learning specific parts of a second language at various ages. To conclude, we can not say for certain whether child or adult is better learner, but one thing we can be sure about is that age influences second language learning.

2.2 Intelligence and Aptitude

Learning a second language involves two sets of intellectual abilities: intelligence and aptitude. Intelligence refers to a hypothesized “general factor” which underlies our ability to master and use a whole range of academic skills. As Stern (1983) noted: intelligence involves what might be called “a general academic or reasoning ability.” This ability is involved in the learning of other school subjects as well as a second language (L2). It is a capacity rather than contents of the mind. Aptitude is a language-specific ability or faculty, distinct from other cognitive abilities. Sometimes it is referred to as a special “talent,” “knack,” or “gift” for learning a foreign language.

To what extent does intelligence influence second language acquisition? Studies so far have not come to a comprehensive conclusion. According to Oller et al. (1981), there exists a global language proficiency factor which accounts for the bulk of the reliable variance in a wide variety of language proficiency measures whereas the opposite view is that intelligence does not appear to be an essential factor in L1 acquisition. Thus it is possible that it is also not very important in SLA, particularly when this is acquired naturally. Cummins (1979) reconciles the two claims by distinguishing two kinds of language ability. That is cognitive/academic language ability (CALP) and basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS). CALP is the dimension of language proficiency which is strongly related to overall cognitive and academic skills and can be equated with Oller et al’s general intelligence; BICS are the skills required for oral fluency and also include sociolinguistic aspects of competence. They are “basic” in the sense that they are developed naturally. The two sets of abilities are independent and to be found in L1 and L2 acquisition. The distinction between CALP and BICS explains a number of