The Effects of Listening
Training on learners

张秀英　著

听力策略培训
对学习者的影响

兰州大学出版社
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前　　言

　　在英语的听、说、读、写、译五项基本技能中,听力的作用占据首要地位,但在中国,无论中学生还是大学生,在英语学习过程中忽视听力和听力学习策略的现象比较普遍, 这就造成了目前中国英语学习者听力普遍较差的现状。

　　早期的听力教学集中于讨论如何通过教师优化语言输入来提高听力理解,直到 20 世纪 60 年代,教学理论的研究才从"如何教"转移到"如何学",听力学习策略培训才引起人们的普遍关注。O'Malley 和 Chamot (1990) 根据信息处理的理论,将语言学习策略分为三大类:元认知策略、认知策略和社会/情感策略。他们认为在这三种策略中,元认知策略高于另外两种策略(1990:119–120),元认知策略是为了成功学习一门外语而采取的管理步骤, 也是学习者调控学习进程的行为,是一种高层次的实施性技巧,可以对学习进程进行计划、规范、监控指导。元认知策略主要分为三类:计划策略、监控策略和评估策略。计划策略是指学习者学习前对学习活动的目标、过程、步骤等做出规划与安排,如确定学习目标、预测难点重点,产生待回答的问题,分析如何完成任务,安排学习时间等。由于元认知对各种认知和学习活动都具有普遍的指导意义, 对其培养训练的结果具有广泛的迁移性。

　　近 30 年来,国内外大量的语言学习策略培训都发现语言学习策略的培训有助于学习者语言能力的提高。当然,听力作为其中的一个语言能力, 听力策略的培训也应该能够提高英语学习者的英语听力和英语能力。近年来国内对学习策略的研究以描述性研究为主,即有关学习策略的确认、定义与分类,某种策略的有效性以及和不同层次的语言熟练度之间的关系等。目前策略培训的误区

在于策略培训基于一种近乎理想化的状态。学习策略应该是一个心理认知过程和具体行为相结合、由认知观念和方法手段构成的动态系统，是学习者关于语言学习的观念和所采取的具体对策的综合体系(王立非,1998)。学习策略的选择与使用受诸多因素的影响，所以不存在一种适合每个学习者或可以用来完成每一项学习任务的策略。不成功的学习者不可能完全、机械地照搬成功者的学习策略(Oxford, 1990)。

本文从教育学和心理学的角度出发，以 O'Mally 和 Chamot (1999) 的认知理论为基础，以 Brown 的教学大纲为模式，以英语专科生为研究对象，并以英语听力策略调查问卷、大学英语四级考试题和学生的听力日记为工具，探讨了听力策略培训，尤其是元认知听力策略和认知听力策略的培训，是否能够提高专科生的英语听力水平以及英语水平的问题。

本研究的一个重要启示是，外语听力教师应对培养学生的听力学习策略的重要性有一个非常清楚的认识，这样才能让学生不仅有效地学习外语听力，而且还能把恰当的学习策略迁移到其他技能方面和其他学科的学习上，最终获得良好的终生学习的能力。教师在教学活动中，除了向学生传授知识以外，也要加强学生有利于外语学习的观念的培养和基于此的语言学习策略的训练，有效地发挥学习策略的作用，使学生在各种环境和条件下都能自主地学习，对提高学习成绩有着极大的促进作用。

本研究结果表明:(1) 英语听力策略培训可以提高英语专科生的英语听力水平;(2) 英语听力策略培训可以提高英语专科生的英语水平。

<div align="right">作者于 2005 年</div>

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CONTENT

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1. Introduction

Since the 1970's, research interest in EFL has shifted from teachers' teaching to students' learning and increasing number of studies have been undertaken from the students' perspective. In particular, studies (Cohen, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Wenden, 1991; Wenden and Rubin, 1987) have highlighted the importance and benefit of learners' learning strategies. Among the language skills, listening has been recognized as a critical aspect of communication. As 50% of a person's time is spent listening (Joan Rubin, 1987: 7), listening has emerged as a major focus for the second and foreign language curriculum. Second/foreign language teachers increasingly agree on the need to teach listening comprehension as a separate skill. For second/foreign language learners, listening is the skill that makes the heaviest processing demands, because learners must store information in short-term memory at the same time as they are working to understand the information. Whereas in reading, learners can go over the text at leisure, they generally do not have the opportunity to do so in listening, nor do they have much time to plan how they are going to process the information, especially in a conversation. Since the online processing demands

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are heavy, learners need to be able to draw upon specific strategies to help them deal with all the information coming at them.

Nowadays, listening is conceived of as an active process in which listeners select and interpret information which comes from auditory and visual clues in order to define what is going on and what the speakers are trying to express (Clark & Silberstein ,1977; Richards ,1983; Mendelsohn 1994). So Rubin (1995, 9) suggests that it is the teacher's responsibility to teach students how to listen and that the strategy–based approach is the one that will bring the biggest improvements in comprehension. Teachers need to help their students by making them aware of the strategies they use in their native language and introduce them some new strategies in listening to a second/foreign language. Also, Language teachers now should consider the learners' strategies integral elements in the design and implementation of effective language instruction.

The present study employs an experimental design to examine the effects of listening strategies training on college English majors.

1.1 Significance of the present study

Although English teaching is a huge profession in the process of reform and renovation in China, it seems to fall far short of meeting the needs generated from the country's rapid develop-ments in economy, science, and technology, and from increasing contact with the outside world. Though some of the graduates have passed the CET–4, or even CET–6, communication with foreigners always fail just for the limited listening and speaking competence.

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So how to improve learners' listening competence is especially important for both teachers and students. In China, though lots of empirical researches have been done to determine how foreign language learners select and evaluate their strategies in the course of a listening enterprise and what they actually know about their listening process, few studies on low-level learners have been done. So the study aims at the effects of LST (listening strategies training) on college English majors, hoping to find out whether we can get some effects from LST or not.

Secondly, it is important that students themselves should be given opportunities to think about their listening, so that they may become aware of their listening strategies.

Thirdly, for both language learners and teachers, it is also important to realize that the proper use of language learning strategies could improve their language competence.

All in all, the study on this problem has its theoretical and practical significance: ① providing the theoretical explanation for listening problems; ② helping people further understand the LS; ③ further emphasizing the importance of LS and ④, most important of all, emphasizing the thinking way to improve the teaching and listening competence.

1.2 Purpose of the present study

The purpose of the study is, from the global perspective, to improve both students' listening skill (how to listen) and their language listening skill and, to report a study, which investigates the

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effects of ELST (English listening strategies training) on college English majors. Specifically, to prove that ① listening strategies training could improve college English majors' listening comprehension; ② listening strategies training could improve college English majors' English competence.

1.3 Need for strategy training research

There are a number of conflicting findings and theoretical positions which suggest areas in strategy training where further research would be useful (Chamot & Kupper, 1989; Grabe, 1991; Nist & Mealey, 1991; Skehan, 1989; Tang; Yussen, 1985). These concerns pertain to;

(i) learner variables which facilitate a successful outcome to training;

(ii) issues of ecological validity;

(iii) questions about the actual trainability of strategies, including length of training , age of participants, explicitness of instruction, transfer of strategies, and persistence over time.

In this study, then, an important focus is on whether strategy training can really improve some low level English learners' whole language competence. Skehan posits "It may well be that different strategies are differentially appropriate at different levels of proficiency" (1989:97) and asks "whether all learners are equally influenceable by strategy training" (1991: 288). Wen (1995), whose research is related to graphics, highlights the need to discover how different variables (such as

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proficiency level) interact with the effectiveness of strategy training using graphics.

It is thus necessary for an explicit strategy training program not only to demonstrate a successful outcome but indicate those factors which contributed positively to the outcome and those factors which contributed negatively to proficiency level, learning approach or other variables. Some of these factors are revealed in this study through a pre–test/post–test followed by a concurrent verbalization.

Ecological validity is another key concern in this study. If we want teachers to teach listening strategies, we must demonstrate their effectiveness in actual classroom instruction; every attempt should be made to maintain the integrity of the existing classroom environment. Chamot and Kupper (1989) stress that training should take place in normal courses. Alvermann and Moore (1991) and Wen (1995) would like to see the strategy topic and it is related issues passed to classroom teachers themselves. Nist and Mealey (1991) comment that most studies so far have involved students from introductory psychology or education classes and have often been laboratory based (e.g., Dansereau et al.1979; Dansereau, 1985). There is, thus, a need to examine students in normal, mainstream classroom situations for wider generalizability of findings. Alvermann and Moore (1991) and Ridgeway et al. (1993) note four checkpoints related to internal validity and "contextualization", namely, that the treatment is part of the normal classroom routine, the teacher introduces the treatment, the text is routinely used in

class, and instruction is provided in strategy use. These points are all taken into consideration in this study.

Another area is in the trainability of text awareness strategies. Nist and Mealey (1991) note that relatively few empirical studies have involved any training component and that even when training has taken place, there have been some doubts about the trainability of strategies. Skehan claims not much systematic work has been carried out to find out "which strategies or strategy categories are most susceptible to training" (1989:288). For example, as Skehan (1989) concludes, the results of O'Malley et al.'s study "provide only limited supporting evidence for the effectiveness of strategy training" (1985b:90) Whilst also acknowledges the limited effects and the general lack of persistence over time. Grabe (1991) does note that intervention studies have shown that learners can be induced to use cognitive strategies, and that strategic intervention can make a difference in learning performance (e.g., Cook & Mayer, 1983; Dansereau et al., 1979; Weinstein et al., 1979; Wong, 1982). To achieve reasonable outcomes, the more complex strategies may need to be explicitly taught to some students (Skehan 1989:95).

With any approach, finding the optimum length of training problematic, time devoted to training will, of course, vary according to the number and complexity of the strategies taught. However, the O'Malley et al.'s (1985b) study was based on a relatively brief intervention period (50 minutes per day for eight days, which was possibly not long enough to show convincing results. Nist and Mealey also comment on the short duration of most strategy training

studies, as little as 15 minutes a session. They maintain that to gain worthwhile statistical results when testing strategies, the treatment and training must continue over a reasonable time span (1991). Alvermann and Moore also feel that mapping "is typically more effective when instruction is long term" (1991:.961). Balanced against these sentiments, however, is the concern that long–term instruction in using a mapping strategy could induce a degree of boredom in learners.

Successful learning, through explicit teaching in this case, implies transfer of strategies to new tasks. Chamot and Kupper (1989) consider that learners may have difficulties in effecting this transfer. Grabe (1991) concurs, noting that strategies have often not been initiated by learners in different domains of content when it might have been appropriate to do so. Nist and Mealey (1991) maintain that strategy–training studies with evidence of transfer to other situations are seriously lacking. While it is difficult to demonstrate transfer totally convincing, one way is to use testing techniques, which employ different situations from those used in the training study. These do allow an illustration of strategy transfer (see Brown et al.'s, 1982, comments reported in 2.3.7; also a discussion of the rationale for test components in 2.3.7.2 and example in 3.4.5).

Another area of interest is the use of (young) adults as subjects. The study by O'Malley (1985a) reveals enormously greater scope for metacognitive abilities by secondary school age compared with younger learners. Yusses (1985) maintains there has been too

much emphasis on strategy acquisition in child development and suggests more stress could be placed on intervention studies with adults.

1.4 Definition of terms

1.4.1 Learning strategies

A dictionary definition of strategy is "clever plan of method; the art of employing plans towards achieving a goal" (Longman Chinese English Dictionary, 1985:1377). From this definition, it is easy to adapt and apply this sense to a learning context: a learning strategy becomes the means to achieve the goal of linguistic competence and the plan of method (Grenfell, M. and V. Harris, 1999).

Learning strategies, according to Weinstein and Mayer (1984), have learning facilitation as a goal and are international on the part of learners. The goal of strategy use is to "affect the learners' motivation of affective state, or the way in which the learner selects, acquires, organizes, or integrates new knowledge"
(Weinstein and Mayer, 1986:315)

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) think that this broad description of learning strategies may include any of the following: focusing on selected aspects of new information, analyzing and monitoring information during acquisition, organizing or elaborating on new information during the encoding process, evaluating the learning when it is completed, or assuring oneself that the learning will be successful as a way of allaying anxiety. Thus, strategies may have an affective or conceptual basis, and may influence the learning of simple tasks, such as learning vocabulary or items in a list, or

complex task, such as language comprehension or language pro-
duction.

Since the early studies from Stern (1983) and Naiman (1978)
and so on, others (Oxford, 1989:291; Wenden and Rubin, 1987:23;
O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; When, 1993; Cohen 1998) have de-
veloped conceptual notions of language learning strategies:

"Strategies contribute to the development of the language
system which the learner constructs and affect learning directly"
(Wenden and Rubin, 1987:23)

Strategies refer to "the special thoughts and behaviors that in-
dividuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new infor-
mation" (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990);Oxford (1989:291) defines
learning strategies as "operations used by learners to aid the ac-
quisition, and retrieval of information." Oxford (1993:175) defines
learning strategies again as: "specific actions, behaviors, steps, or
techniques that students employ to improve their progress in inter-
nalizing, storing, retrieving, and using the L2".

Qiufang(2003) defines the term "strategies" as actions tak-
en to facilitate the accomplishment of language learning task.

Cohen (1998) defines language learning and language use
strategies as those processes which are consciously selected by
learners and which may result in the action taken to enhance the
learning or use of a second or foreign language, through the storage,
retention, recall, and application of information about that language.

The thesis prefers O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) definition of
the learning strategies.