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AWAKENING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' METACOGNITION IN THE PROCESS OF LISTENING COMPREHENSION

Summary: The present study investigated the awareness of metacognitive listening strategies among university-level tourism and hospitality students in Serbia. To this end, MALQ questionnaire (Vandergrift et al., 2006) was used. The study aimed at gaining the insight into the students' habit of using metacognitive strategies (MCSs) in listening comprehension (LC) and detecting those that are most frequently used by the observed population. The obtained results show that the subjects belong to medium metacognitive strategy users, while the most frequently employed strategies belong to while-listening phase of LC.

Key words: metacognition, metacognitive strategies, listening comprehension, teacher's roles

Introduction

After the long period of having been neglected, the importance of listening comprehension (LC) for second language acquisition has been recognized, which is confirmed by a vast body of research (Byrnes 1984, Rost 1990, Mendelsohn and Rubin 1995, Oxford 1990, 2003; Vandergrift 1998, 2002, 2003, 2008; Goh 2008, Goh and Taib 2006, Field 2001). Thus, it is considered nowadays the basic and most important skill in the process of language learning and acquisition. LC facilitates the acquisition of both language rules and other language skills. Having the aforementioned in mind, studying LC strategies can help to better understand the very process of LC, and in that way it can provide a solid theoretical basis for the activities that foreign language teachers should use in the classroom, which would lead to the systematic development of this skill. The awareness of LC strategies and the possibility of their controlled use contributes to the students taking full advantage of the potential of the information they receive.

Metacognition, often referred to as the 'seventh sense' in learning (Nisbet and Shucksmith 1986), comprises self-reflection and self-regulation. In other words, it implies the ability to think about our own thinking and to evaluate and manage the way we do it. In this regard, metacognitive instruction in L2 listening refers to pedagogical methods that increase learner awareness about listening process. In particular, it develops more profound metacognitive

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knowledge concerning personal characteristics (the knowledge about individuals as learners), task characteristics (understanding the purpose and demands of a task) and the knowledge of strategies (knowing the nature of strategies and the way they should be used) (Flawell 1976, Wenden 1998, Goh 1997) for developing LC. In its effort to achieve the final goal of improving the learners' overall ability to listen, metacognitive instruction in LC makes learners become more skilled in using the processes of (1) planning for the activity; (2) monitoring comprehension; (3) solving comprehension problems; and (4) evaluating the approach and outcomes.

Since metacognitive processes involve conscious attention to one's thoughts, it can be said that they are by their nature active. However, for a successful learning to happen, learners have to put metacognition in action. This implies that apart from being aware and thoughtful about one's cognition and learning, learners must act on the thoughts they have. In other words, they have to use metacognitive strategies (MCSs). According to Cohen and Dörnyei (2002), these strategies are the processes that learners consciously use to supervise or manage their learning. When talking about LC process, the implementation of MCSs would mean that in planning for the activity, listeners first make predictions using the already gained knowledge (concerning the content of the text, the word choice, etc.), select appropriate strategies (depending on the task demands) and decide on the ways of distributing their attention. While monitoring their listening process and making online evaluation, listeners decide whether the choice of strategies is the correct one. At the same time, they deal with the problems they face. Eventually, after the task completion, they evaluate their LC process and outcomes and rethink the strategies used. Incorporating such behaviour would mean taking an active part in LC and developing listening as a skill.

However, before putting metacognition into action, it needs to be awaken, i.e. students should be aware of metacognition, both its existence and its potentials. This can be done at the level of overall language acquisition, developing specific language skills or solving particular tasks. For the sake of our research, we are looking into awakening metacognition in the process of LC of tertiary-level students. As a data collecting tool, the research employs MALQ, the questionnaire designed by Vandergrift and his colleagues that has been widely used in researching metacognitive strategies worldwide (Vandergrift et al. 2006, O'Bryan and Hegelheimer 2009, Baleghizadeh & Rahimi 2011, Tavakoli et al. 2012, Rahimi & Katal 2012, Goh and Hu 2013, Li 2013, Sahragrard 2015).

After looking into relevant literature and giving the basic data on the current research, the paper will present the obtained results, and provide discussion suggesting pedagogical implications.

Literature review – Metacognition and listening comprehension

The first research into the field of metacognition and LC dealt with MCS taxonomy (Rost and Ross 1991, Vandergrift 1992, Vandergrift and Goh 2012). After these initial studies, the research interest focused on the differences in strategy use between successful and less successful listeners (Murphy 1985, O'Malley and Chamot 1990, Goh 2002, Vandergrift 2003a, 2005, Yang 2009, Li 2013, Atuwairesh 2016). The largest body of the research has shown that there is a difference in both the repertoire of the strategies that the two groups used and in the controlled way of their use which characterises more skilled listeners (Chamot and Kupper 1989, O'Malley, Chamot and Kupper 1989).

More recent research, however, investigates the influence of metacognitively orient-

ed instruction on LC success. The research results point to the fact that imposing students to metacognitive instruction has beneficial effect on LC (Goh and Taib 2006, Goh 2008, Graham and Macaro 2008). The suggested recommendations go in favour of twofold nature of metacognitive instruction. Namely, apart from modelling metastrategic behaviour, language teachers should also enable students to get to know their learning and listening self, as well as to get them acquainted with the processes and demands of LC (Goh 2008). Graham and Macaro (2008) maintain that the students' active role in the process of strategically oriented instruction is the first and foremost precondition of a long-term successful strategy use. This active role primarily refers to the choice, implementation and evaluation of the used strategies. However, it is almost impossible to achieve if the FL instruction is based solely on strategies used by successful learners. Instead, the instruction should be 'learner-centred and task-specific', i.e. it should be fine-tuned with the learning style of individual learners, regardless of their language level.

Since its development in 2006, MALQ has been widely used so far. Goh and Hu (2013) use MALQ to investigate the relationship between listening performance and metacognitive awareness. The results point to a positive relationship between the two factors. Li (2013) uses MALQ to investigate MCS use and its relevance for LC success at the university level of EFL learning. The results point to the lack of metacognitive awareness among the observed subjects and discrepancy in MCS use between successful and less-successful learners. One of the latest researches examining the use of MCS by successful university EFL learners is the one conducted by Atuwairesh (2016). Namely, using think-aloud protocols with the group of three successful students, after administering MALQ among Saudi subjects, she comes to the conclusion that most frequently used MCS are planning (selective attention and advance organisation) and evaluation (monitoring), whereas problem solving and directed attention proved to be the two most prominent strategies. A very interesting study confirming the beneficial influence of using MALQ on metacognitive awareness is the one undertaken by Sahragrard et al. (2015). They used MALQ with experimental and control group of students, where experimental group was tested seven times per semester on MCS use and the control one only two times – at the beginning and the end of a semester. Despite the fact that neither of them was exposed to any metacognitively oriented instruction, the obtained results showed that the experimental group significantly benefited.

As for the MCS use research in Serbia, it is rather scarce. So far MCS have been observed only as a set within a learning strategy use of university students (Knežević and Luković Vojnović 2018). Another research undertaken with secondary school subjects used expanding metacognitive awareness to investigate the relationship between L2 vocabulary knowledge and listening test scores (Jerotijević Tišma 2016). However, before immersing into more complex issues, it is necessary to get the insight into metacognitive behavior of students in the process of LC.

Motivation for the research

Apart from being motivated by the lack of research investigating metastrategic behavior of EFL learners in Serbia, this study is additionally motivated by the authors' classroom observations. Namely, EFL for a tourism classroom is ever often charactrised by:
- an ever lower level of language knowledge – confirmed by placement test undertaken with the first year students at the Faculty of Hotel Management and Tourism (HMT) in Vrnjacka Banja, University of Kragujevac,

- problems in understanding when faced with LC,
- a non-systematic approach to language learning, and
- students' unfamiliarity with the concept of learner autonomy – which is of utmost importance for a positive learning outcome at the tertiary level of education.

Having in mind the aforementioned issues, this study aims at getting insight into metacognitive behavior of university students in the process of LC as well as identifying the strategies which are most often employed by the observed population.

Research description

The subjects of the research are first-, second- and third-year tourism and hospitality students (34, 43, and 41, respectively) studying at the Faculty of HMT in Vrnjačka Banja, who voluntarily agreed to take part in the research. They have been learning English as a foreign language for 12 to 14 years.

In order to get insight into the way students understand and control their LC process, i.e. to identify metacognitive strategies used in LC, the research employs MALQ (designed by Vandergrift et al., 2006). For the sake of research, the questionnaire was translated into Serbian, so as to avoid any misunderstanding on the part of the subjects. The research questions that this diagnostic study tries to answer are: (1) How aware the observed population is of MCS, (2) Which strategies are used with high frequency (3.5 and above) and (3) Whether the strategy use depends on the year of studies.

Research results

Table 1. Metacognitive strategy use by tourism and hospitality students

Rank	Statement	Overall Mean	Standard deviation	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3	
				M	R	M	R	M	R
1	9. I use my experience and knowledge to help me understand.	4.19	0.990	4.32	1	4.19	1	4.18	2
2	5. I use the words I understand to guess the meaning of the words I don't understand.	4.1	1.229	4.26	2	3.59	9	4.41	1
3	2. I focus harder on the text when I have trouble understanding.	3.89	1.066	3.59	9	3.72	3	3.89	3
4	4. I translate key words as I listen.	3.61	1.329	3.62	8	3.56	6	/	
5	20. As I listen, I periodically ask myself if I am satisfied with my level of comprehension.	3.57	1.215	3.53	11	3.67	4	3.57	5
6	17. I use the general idea of the text to help me guess the meaning of the words that I don't understand.	3.54	1.121	3.79	5	/		3.54	6

Source: The authors

Table 1 shows the most frequently used strategies for the observed population, including mean and the strategy rank. It also provides data on strategies used with high frequency according to the year of studies with their corresponding ranks.

The overall rate of metacognitive strategy use for the observed population is 3.16, which characterises the frequency of their use as medium.

The obtained results show that, at the level of the observed population, there are six strategies that are used with the average of 3.5 and higher. Furthermore, all six strategies are online strategies, i.e. used while listening. However, they belong to four different types of MCSs – problem solving (3), directed attention (1), mental translation (1) and evaluation (1).

As for problem-solving strategies during the process of LC, the observed population most often uses activating schemata (Statement 9) and guessing/inferencing (Statements 5 and 17). With the mean of 4.32, Year 1 subjects seem to be most active in using their schematic knowledge in the process of LC. This strategy is the most frequently used one among Year 2 subjects, while it takes rank 2 among Year 3 subjects. Although guessing is ranked on the overall as the 2nd most frequent, there is certain discrepancy in its ranking at the group level. Although highly scored by Year 1 and Year 3 subjects (ranks 2 and 1, respectively), Year 2 subjects do not use it so often, which is confirmed by its rank (9). Another inconsistency in use at the group level is noticeable at the strategy ranked 6 by the entire population. Although rated as 5 and 6 by Year 1 and Year 3 subjects, respectively, it is not used as a high-frequency strategy among Year 2 subjects.

Rank 3 is given to a directed attention strategy (Statement 2). Directed attention strategies are those that students use to concentrate and which allow them to stay on task. Comparing ranks at the group level, we can see that Year 1 subjects use this strategy only as the 9th most frequent.

Although with a high average at the level of the overall population, mental translation (Statement 4) is not given such a high rank by the individual groups. It takes only positions 8 and 6 among Year 1 and Year 2 subjects, respectively, while it does not belong to the group of high-frequently used strategies when it comes to Year 3 subjects.

The only evaluation strategy that is used by the observed population (Statement 20) is ranked as number 5. It is interesting to note that the same strategy is given the rank 11 among Year 1 subjects.

Results interpretation and pedagogical implications

With the mean of 3.16, the observed population is classified as medium MCS users. This would further mean that though aware of MCSs and despite using them, the subjects do not employ them in a systematic way, but rather randomly. Such a result causes a further thought, having in mind the importance of MCSs as a means of successful learning (both FL and other subject-matter) as well as a means of building an independent learner (Pešić, Marinković 2016). It is also less satisfactory than the results obtained by Knežević and Luković Vojnović (2018) that show tourism students as high-frequency MCS users with the average mean of 3.85, or Li (2013) where the obtained mean of MCS use among non-English majors university students amounts 3.65. Table 1 shows that most frequently used strategies belong to the subgroups of problem solving, directed attention, mental tran-

slation and evaluation. Such results are in line with the findings of Atuwairesh (2016) and Tavakoli et al. (2012) who, examining metastrategic behavior of university students, come to the conclusion that problem solving and directed attention are the strategies that successful learners use more often than others. A significant positive influence of directed attention and problem solving is also confirmed in the study of Goh and Hu (2013).

The most frequently used strategies belong to the subgroup of problem solving. These strategies are activated in response to problems that arise while listening, i.e. they are used to inference meaning and to monitor if the inferences are correct (Vandergrift et al., 2006). Table 1 shows that three out of six strategies used with high frequency belong to this subgroup, or, more specifically, to schemata activation and inferencing/guessing (*I use my experience and knowledge to help me understand*; *I use the words I understand to guess the meaning of the words I don't understand*; and, *I use the general idea of the text to help me guess the meaning of the words that I don't understand*). Such a frequent use of problem-solving strategies might be the indicator that students rather often face problems in the process of LC. On the other hand, as the use of schemata activation and inferencing are the most useful means of improving LC, students should be fostered to further employ these strategies. The obtained results confirm Berne's (2004) findings. Namely, in her review of the results of a number of studies that tried to find the differences and similarities in the strategic behavior of successful and less successful listeners, using previously gained knowledge for inferencing the meaning and the strategy of guessing the meaning of new words stand out at the group of successful listeners. Problem-solving as the most commonly used strategy is also confirmed in Li's research (2013).

Another interesting fact drawn by the obtained results is that all most frequently used strategies are the online ones, i.e. employed during the LC task. This further means that pre- and post-task strategy use is not developed enough, i.e. that students do not use advance planning or think about similar texts as a guide, which would make their LC easier. At the same time, there is no proof of reflecting in the post-listening phase, either. Thus, students seem to approach LC task in a rather unsystematic way. Similar results are achieved by Lin (2002). Such a behavior diminishes students' chances for achieving success in listening and call for teacher's intervention – teaching students how to plan and evaluate their LC activity, and, more generally, instructing and helping students develop their general MC ability. In this regard, more attention is to be given to the pre- and post-listening phases of the comprehension process, i.e. to acquiring those strategies that would contribute to the systematic development of LC.

According to Richards (1990), planning and evaluation represent the purposeful nature of the comprehension process and the online and off-line appraisal of whether comprehension goals are realised. Planning stage prepares listeners to be proactive in their listening efforts. During this preparation stage, students should be asked to recall any new information concerning the topic, their attention should be focused on the vocabulary they expect to hear, they should be reminded of the text genre (e.g. *Before listening, I think of similar texts that I may have listened to*) and asked about the expected structure of the text. Having in mind the purpose of listening, they should be asked where they would pay attention and how many details they expect to find (e.g. *Before I start to listen, I have a plan in my head for how I am going to listen*), etc. Another way of getting students accustomed to planning before listening could be setting personal goals for a particular

listening task, which could be done by asking questions related to their hopes concerning expected achievements, or the number of times they should be listening to a particular text in order to maintain the given task.

On the other hand, the process of evaluation takes place both during listening, when it is closely connected with monitoring, and after listening, when the overall approach to listening task should be considered (e.g. *After listening, I think back to how I listened, and about what I might do differently next time*). This means that teachers should help students reflect on difficulties they faced or the things that went wrong, as well as discuss the possible reasons why it happened. However, this stage could also be used to boost students' self-confidence and encourage them to talk about strategies that they used with success, the ways they solved the problems, etc. In such a way, students are made aware that they should be in charge of LC process, i.e. that they can control it and that the success of their listening (and, consequently, learning) is dependable upon themselves. In other words, they are to approach the role of listening/learning in an active way.

One of the preconditions for successful listening is keeping concentration on track. Directed attention strategies represent the important roles that attention and concentration have in LC process. Thus, skilled listeners have the ability of maintaining attention and keeping the concentration on the incoming information while, at the same time, regulating other metacognitive processes (Vandergrift et al., 2006, 451). However, directing attention seems to be the problem that rather large number of subjects faces, as only one of directed attention strategies is used with high frequency by the observed population. In order to improve the metastrategic behavior of students concerning this set of strategies, they should be prepared to listen to one text more than once. At beginning stages, each listening should focus on one task only, followed by discussion on strategy use. In this way, students would not feel the pressure of multitasking, i.e. not being able to fulfill given tasks and, at the same time, they would be deployed of the tunnel vision effect, where by looking for the meaning of an unknown word they would miss the whole chunk of the text. It is very important to help them use the context and other MCSs to overcome the difficulties they face in understanding due to the lack of lexical knowledge.

The set of mental translation strategies is something to be avoided if students are to become skilled listeners. They all represent an inefficient approach to LC too often used by beginner learners. The obtained results point to the fact that students use key word translation to help them understand the listening text. Though, generally speaking, mother tongue interference is not considered beneficial in the process of LC, Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010) maintain that key word translation is closely related with inferencing strategy, which puts it on the list of useful strategies. However, this strategy is not used by Year 3 students and for Year 1 and 2 students it is not one of top five strategies, which further means that it should be developed among the observed population.

Eventually, we cannot but notice that most frequently used MCSs do not encompass person knowledge. According to Vandergrift and his colleagues, person knowledge is 'Judgments about one's learning abilities and knowledge about the internal and external factors that affect success or failure in one's learning.' (Vandergrift et al. 2006: 433). This only confirms the aforementioned stance that students do not approach listening/learning task in a systematic way.

Conclusion

Taking into consideration the obtained results and highlighted pedagogical implications, the following concluding suggestions concerning metastrategic instruction can be given. In order to develop metastrategic behaviour among student population, it is necessary to devote at least one part of the class to strategy instruction. University language instructors thus gain another role, the one of a strategy model and moderator. Namely, the best way to introduce strategic behavior is by strategy modelling (primarily at the task level) and motivating students to talk with their peers about strategy use both prior to and following task completion. In such a way, students awareness of the possibility of controlling the process of learning would be raised, which would be only the introduction into developing successful listeners and independent learners.

At the end, we dare say that the very use of MALQ questionnaire is beneficial per se. Namely, the students are made aware of the possibility to control the listening, i.e. learning process(es). Consequently, its use can positively influence students' attitudes and their perceptions of the LC process, which would finally lead to their development into skilled listeners able to regulate metacognitive comprehension processes automatically (Vandergrift, 2008: 94). Moreover, it can be used as a self-assessment tool that would help students determine the current level of metacognitive awareness and to monitor the development of their strategy use, i.e. listening awareness over time.

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BUĐENJE SVESTI UNIVERZITETSKIH STUDENATA O METAKOGNICIJI
PRI PROCESU RAZUMEVANJA GOVORA

Sažetak: Na razvijanju veštine razumevanja govora, kao osnovnog preduslova usvajanja jezika i uspešne komunikacije, neophodno je sistematski raditi. U tom smislu, kod učenika je potrebno razviti dva tipa kompetencije – lingvističke i (meta)strategijeske. Kada su u pitanju univerzitetski studenti, koji se obično smatraju pasivnim primaocima informacija, uloga nastavnika jezika prevazilazi razvijanje lingvističke kompetencije. Naime, ona mora da obuhvati i razvijanje procedura i alata koji olakšavaju usvajanje jezika i kontrolu procesa učenja, posebno razvijanjem (meta)strategijske kompetencije, čime bi se studenti preobrazili u nezavisne i aktivne učesnike procesa učenja. Iako je ovaj tip strategija već duže vreme u žiži naučnog interesovanja širom sveta, njihvoj upotrebi među studentima na univerzitetskom nivou u Srbiji posvećena je srazmerno mala pažnja. U ovom radu koristimo MALQ upitnik (Vandergrift et al. 2006) kako bismo stekli uvid u metakognitivno ponašanje studenata turizma u toku procesa razumevanja govora. Naš cilj je bio da ovim istraživanjem otkrijemo u kojoj meri je posmatrana studentska populacija svesna metakognitivnih strategija i koje strategije koristi u najvećoj meri. Rezultati upućuju na činjenicu da ispitanici koriste metakognitivne strategije u nedovoljnoj meri. Strategije koje se učestalošću svoje upotrebe ističu jesu strategije rešavanja problema i usmerene pažnje.

Ključne reči: metakognicija, metakognitivne strategije, razumevanje govora, uloga nastavnika