On the Effect of Phonetic Transcription and Morphological Awareness on Performing Listening Tasks

Hooshang Yazdani  
English Department, Arak University, Arak, Iran

Afsaneh Afshin Mehr  
English Department, Islamic Azad University, Zahedan Branch, Iran

Hojjat Yousefali (Corresponding Author)  
English Department, Arak University, Arak, Iran

Javad Rezazadeh Yazdeli  
English Department, Arak University, Arak, Iran

Abstract

Considering the importance of language elements in skill learning, the current research was an attempt to bring to light the effects of phonetic transcription and morphological awareness on listening comprehension, especially performing listening tasks. To put this aim into effect, 30 Iranian intermediate language learners were selected and then, respecting twins of independence and equality of chance, they were assigned to either control or experimental group in a random fashion. Conducting a separate experiment for each variable, participants were treated with phonetic and morphological instructions respectively. Then, using SPSS their performance on post tests were compared. The results of statistical analysis demonstrated that both phonetic transcription and morphological awareness have significant effects on performing listening tasks. These findings have implication for language teachers, language learners, curriculum designers and EFL theorists.

Keywords: Listening Task, Morphological Awareness, Phonetic Transcription, Skill Integration.
1. INTRODUCTION

Today, in the world of language learning and teaching, nobody turns a blind eye to the very fact of skill integration. All scholars and theorists in the field of language teaching and learning believe that teaching skills and elements of language results in a better learning outcome because skills and elements of the language are mutually enhanced. Considering the problems associated with language-centered methods such as ALM, in later approaches towards language learning the importance of listening and speaking in unrehearsed situation received greater weight and this fact clings to life until now (Richards, 2008). Besides, in skill integration approaches, listening is one of the most crucial elements of learning and teaching in both EFL and ESL contexts. However, overcoming the difficulties of listening, stands in the need of some strategies including note taking, practice, enjoying good strategies and feeling relaxed. Underscoring the importance of listening in language learning, Kurita (2012) believes that successful listeners must build on developing individual listening strategies. In addition, Vandergrift (2004) believes that learning listening is a fundamental element for language learning to occur. Previously, elaborating on the factors that introduce problems to learning listening, Yagang (1993) had underlined the importance of listening and tackling the problems learners encounter in the way of learning this crucial skill. Thus a glance at review of literature produces numerous evidence fir this fact that listening is an inseparable skill of learning second language. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us, the language teachers to identify native problems in the way of learning these skills and examine possible solutions to our own environment. Bulks of research in EFL and ESL contexts have shed light on classes of different problems. About a decade and half ago, Goh (2000) listed the most frequent problems and reported that quick forgetting of just heard utterances, disability to recognize the words they already know, disability to understand the intended message, missing next part while thinking about meaning of the just heard utterance and disability to form a mental representation from the words and utterances heard. Previously, Underwood (1989) had presented another list of problems that learners are faced with during performing listening task, based on which lack of control over the speed at which speakers speak, disability to get things repeated, limited vocabulary, failure in recognizing the signals, interpretation problems, distraction, and bad learning habit were mostly observed problems. Not unlike these researchers, more recently, Field (2003) put forward another list of difficulties and stated that learners may know the word, but get the wrong sense, in other words, learners know the word in written form but fail to identify it when uttered in the oral form. Besides, in his study on listening problems, Chen (2005) brought to light a different category of problems including learners’ belief-related barriers, barriers associated with materials, habitudinal barriers, barriers encountered in information processing techniques, barriers related to the proficiency level of the learners, strategic barriers and affective barriers. Also, Yousif (2006) investigated the psychological problems which deter development of listening skills.

In spite of all these innovations and variety of researches on the role of listening, the importance of elements of language on skill learning is little investigated. Amongst language elements that are proved to play vital roles in skill learning, on top of that on learning...
listening, are cognition-related abilities such as morphological and phonological aspects of language. Investigating these factors in learning language skills, (Carlisle, 2003) called attention to understanding children’s development of phonological awareness that includes awareness of sound unites of language and postulated that this understanding plays a crucial role on children’s language learning specially reading and writing abilities. In addition, a number of researchers have shown that phonological awareness poses a critical role in the learning of alphabetic languages such as English and non-alphabetical ones such as Chinese (Nagy, et al 2006). Too, according to Kuo and Anderson (2006) phonological awareness helps comprehension of printed text and semantic information. Furthermore, in the recent decade, there has been a growing interest to investigate the role of morphological awareness as another element of language that plays a key role in language learning, on top of that learning skills. Carlisle (2003) believes that orthography of English language that makes morphological awareness a key factor for language development, skill learning and on top of that learning reading and writing abilities. Also, considering the inter-relation of morphology and phonology, a number of researches like those of Kuo and Anderson (2006) and Verhoeven and Perfetti (2003) have shown that morphological awareness plays a crucial role in child’s English reading acquisition beyond that of phonological awareness because it helps the child know the semantic relations between words while ignoring their phonological similarity.

Taking into consideration the issues touched above and the observation of the researcher, it is seen that Iranian intermediate EFL learner suffer the same difficulties in listening comprehension especially those related to phonetics and morphology. For instance, it is seen that Iranian EFL learners are mislead by phonetic variation of words including reductions, assimilations and elisions. In morphology the same has observed to be the case for Iranian EFL learner. It has repeatedly seen that these learners fail to decipher morphologically loaded elements of language such as poly-morphemic vocabularies.

In addition, little research is done in EFL contexts to investigate the roles phonetic and morphology play in skill learning especially in learning listening. Also, little is done to investigate the effect of both morphology and phonetic simultaneously on performing listening tasks if at all. Therefore, the current research would be an attempt to shed light on the effect phonetic transcription and morphological awareness on performing listening tasks in Iranian EFL learners. The outcome of this research is an attempt to find a solution to native listening difficulties Iranian learners are suffering from.

Therefore, the following research questions will be answered:

1. Does phonetic transcription have a significant effect of Iranian intermediate language learners in performing listening tasks?

2. Does morphological awareness-raising have a significant effect of Iranian intermediate language learners in performing listening tasks?

2. Literature Review

In a longitudinal study by Lam (2009), the effects of morphological awareness on reading in Chinese and English language were examined and possible interfaces of these effects with phonetic awareness were investigated. This researched comprised of two different studies.
the first study, 84 kindergarten and first grade Chinese-speaking English language learners from Canada were selected for the purpose of the study. Then, the participants’ morphological awareness, vocabulary and reading comprehension were evaluated at two successive cross-sections. In the second study, however, kindergarteners and first grader language learners from China were selected based on appropriate sampling procedures. Too, morphological awareness, vocabulary and reading comprehension of these participants in Chinese were measured at the beginning of two successive academic courses. The results obtained from the first study of the research demonstrated that morphological awareness plays a vital role in English vocabulary learning and reading comprehension abilities of students. It is worth mentioning that the outcome of this section of the research showed that development resulted from morphological awareness is sensitive to change in age and phonetic awareness of the students. Furthermore, the results of the second study of the research brought to light the fact that compound awareness on morphology and phonetics confidently predicts vocabulary learning of children from both Canada and China. Thus, briefly saying, submitted proofs on the facilitative role of morphological awareness and phonetic knowledge in language learning, on top of that learning reading, in a variety of contexts. Also, investigating the role of aforesaid element in language learning, Krik and Gillon (2009) in a study titled “Integrated Morphological Awareness Intervention as a Tool for Improving Literacy” appraised the possible effects of an intervention program planned to improve reading and spelling ability. This program administered by the researcher through instruction in morphological awareness as well as other forms of linguistic awareness such as knowledge of phonology, orthography, syntax, and semantics. For that reason, they selected sixty children aged between eight years and 7 months and eleven years and one month who were already identified as suffering from specific spelling difficulties. Then, based on procedures of random sampling, these subjects were allocated to either an experimental or a control group. Then, these participants received an average of nineteen intervention session with heavy weight given to increasing awareness of the morphological structure of words while not ignoring the orthographic rules that apply when suffixes are added to the roots. The results of this experiment showed that subjects in the experimental group developed in reading and spelling accuracy to a great extent while those in the control group did not enjoy the benefits of such development. Too, the results of the study produced evidences that subjects in experimental group were able to generalize to new words the things they had learned in the intervention sessions to the other contexts of use. However, probing the same line of research in Iran, Karimi and Gheitury (2009) inquired into the impact of morphological awareness on listening transcription of Iranian pre-university students. They, therefore, considering the background and literature of the subject planned to bring to light the link between morphological awareness and listening transcription ability of Iranian pre-university students. To put this goal into effect, they selected forty 40 pre-university students and assigned them to either control or experimental group in a random sampling fashion. Then, both groups were given three short listening passages and students were asked to transcribe. The scores obtained from this test served as pre-test performance of
the subjects. The results of the independent-samples t-test revealed no significant difference between the two groups on the pre-test. After that, the experimental group, was treated with five one-hour sessions, receiving instruction on the morphological realization of English words. The two groups were then given three short listening passages to transcribe the scores of which were collected as post-test scores. The results of comparing mean scores through SPSS showed that morphological awareness brings about a significant gain in listening ability of pre-university students in EFL contexts of Iran.

In another study in the contexts of Iran in 2013, Saeidi and Mirzapour explored the impact of morphological awareness on listening comprehension ability of Iranian university students. This study investigated the relationship between morphological awareness and listening comprehension ability in Iranian EFL learners. Morphological awareness in this research was defined based on principal definitions found in literature review such as those proposed by Carlisle (2003). 25 female students and 15 male students enrolled in the second semester of TEFL in Hamedan Azad University were selected randomly as the subjects of the study. Then, they were randomly assigned to control and experimental groups. Four short listening passages were used as the pre-test which included 30 tokens of words with morphemic structures. The results of the pre-test revealed no significant difference between two groups. Then four one hour sessions were held for the experimental group. After four sessions, four short listening passages were used as the post-test. The results of the independent-sample t-test showed a significant difference between the two groups. These findings, too, submitted proofs on facilitative effect of morphological awareness on learning listening of English learners.

3. Methodology
3.1 Participants
For the purpose of this study, 30 intermediated students enrolled in Top Notch courses in a language institute in Zahedan were selected. Then, randomly, 15 students were allocated to either control or experimental group. All assumptions of random sampling procedure were taken into account in which all these thirty students had equal and independent chance of being assigned to control and experimental groups (MacKay & Gass, 2006).

3.2 Instrumentation
In order to answer the research question and meet the requirements of the present research, the researcher stood in the need of some instruments and tools. To find an answer to first question, the researcher developed two teacher-made listening tasks which insisted on depicting phonetic aspects of the language in comprehending listening. In other words, the tasks were phonetically loaded to meet the requirements of the research. The reliability and validity of the tasks were verified through appropriate measures. In order to find an answer to the second question, however, the researcher adopted listening tasks from Lam (2009). Also, to compare means on post-test, statistical package for social science (SPSS), version 19, was used.
3.3 Procedure
For each question and separately, first a listening task was administered to both groups as a pretest. This is done to ensure the equality in performance of control and experimental groups. Then, for each question, the experimental group was treated with its respective instruction. This part was done in 5 successive session, every one other day. Then, again a listening task was administered to both experimental and control groups to investigate the effects of treatment. Then, the difference between means of control and experimental groups was investigated through independent samples t-test and the results were presented in different tables and analyzed respectively.

4. Results and Discussion
To obtain results of the different questions of the research, the scores obtained on the post-tests were entered in the software and differences between mean score of students were investigated. The results of the first question, investigating the effect of phonetic transcription on performing listening task is presented in the following tables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Samples Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of this questions demonstrated that experimental group outperformed on the post-test and this, in turn, shows that phonetic transcription intervention played a significant role on students’ performance in listening tasks. As it is seen in the SPSS output, the significance was lower than .05, which brings to light the very fact of significant difference between mean score of control group and that of experimental after treatment. These findings are in line with those of Lame (2009) and McBride and his colleagues, endorsing the critical role that the knowledge of phonetics and phonology plays in performing listening tasks and listening comprehension.
Besides, the results of second questions, exploring the effect of morphological awareness on student’s listening task, are presented in the following tables:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Statistics</th>
<th>values</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>groups</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14.6667</td>
<td>1.44749</td>
<td>.37374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16.2667</td>
<td>1.38701</td>
<td>.35813</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Samples Test</th>
<th>Levene's Test</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>groups</td>
<td>.085</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>-3.091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>-3.091</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Too, the results obtained from the second question show that morphological awareness plays a significant effects on student’s performance in listening task. The statistical output of the software stands firm behind this fact because it shows that the level of significance is lower than .05 and this produces evidence that there is a significant difference between mean score of control group and that of experimental on post-test (after treatment). These results are in line with McBride, et al (2005), Lam (2009), Saeidi & Mirzapour (2013) and Karimi & Gheitury (2009).

5. Conclusion

According to Widdowson (1997) a good teacher is a medium between theory and practice, therefore, a teacher must be involved with continuous action research to build on theoretical foundation and find local solutions to his own problems. Also, according to Kumaravadivelue (2008), teaching language is not a one size fit all approach; therefore, teachers must have their local approaches in teaching in which local knowledge, local culture and local style of language learners are considered. Due to aforesaid issue, the current research was an attempt to light upon local solutions to difficulties that Iranian language learners are faced with in performing listening tasks with regards to phonetic and morphology of language. Understanding and describing these difficulties is of great service to language teachers to make up for these problems.
Also, the current research was the only research that investigates the role of phonetic and morphological awareness on performing listening tasks at the same time. This innovation not only brings to light the effect each factor has on performing listening task, but also lays groundwork to find the interface of these two elements on performing listening tasks. In addition, language teachers, language learners and curriculum designers, who have in mind to enjoy the potentials of nativized English can use the results of this study.
References