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In the Name of God

**Brain Hemisphericity and Metacognitive
Listening Strategies**

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Introduction

Listening is a language experience that operates in contexts ranging from simple conversations to academic discussions (Kottacheruvu, 2014). Despite its importance, listening is often regarded as a product rather than a process and in classes teachers simply look at the answers which students give rather than the process they use to get these answers (Field, 2008). A successful listener can focus on the subject he is hearing, design what to listen for, use both bottom-up processing (e.g., textual cues) and top-down processing (i.e., prior knowledge and experience). More skillful listeners adopt both cognitive and metacognitive strategies in order to understand most of the text that they listen to (Goh, 2002). They use their prior knowledge of linguistic cues and contextual information, whereas less skillful listeners use a limited number of strategies and are frequently confused by unfamiliar words and phrases that they encounter in the listening text (Liu, 2008). Listening is an active process that involves deciphering and constructing meaning from

verbal and non-verbal messages (Nunan, 1998). The mental processes that listeners use to understand the spoken language can be generally described as listening comprehension strategies (Coskun, 2010).

Learners use cognitive and **metacognitive strategies** to control and regulate their own learning (Perfect & Schwartz, 2002). Metacognitive skills and strategies can be used in any subject area of the school curriculum and in the thought processes of children such as attention, motivation, learning, memory, and understanding. Metacognition is “knowledge and cognition about cognitive phenomena” (Flavell, 1979, p. 206). Metacognition comprises three components: metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive experience, and strategy use (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Research shows that strategy use plays an important role in many cognitive activities regarding language use (e.g., Goh, 2008; Mokhtari, Sheorey & Rezaei, 2008; Song & Cheng, 2006). Moreover, research has pointed to the powerful role of metacognition in learning and the potential for the greater use of metacognitive strategies (Vandergrift, 1997). In sum, metacognitive strategies are considered as the most essential ones in developing learners’ skills (Anderson, 1991).

Language learning strategies have been widely discussed in language learning research. However, in recent years more attention has been given to exploring the factors which may affect the choice of these strategies among learners. Among these factors, the learning style has proved to have a strong effect on the learners’ application of different types of strategies (Vandergrift, 1997). In the literature, various learning styles and learning style models have been defined. The differences among

definitions and models evolve from the fact that scholars define learning styles by focusing on different aspects (Yilmaz-Soylu & Akkoyunlu, 2002). For instance, Reid (1995) defines 'learning style' as "an individual's characteristics and natural, habitual, and preferred way(s) of absorbing, processing, organizing and retaining new information and skills" (p. viii). One such dimension in the learning style continuum applicable to second/foreign language learning and teaching is left- and right-brain functioning (Brown, 2007). Dulger (2012) argues that brain **hemisphericity** is closely linked to learning styles, which are influential on individuals' use of learning strategies. Similarly, Gibson (2002) contends that brain dominance has certain effects on language learners' learning and communication.

Research into an individual's brain behavior and associating it to his performances has basically come in the form of examining functions of the various parts of the individual's brain. That is to say, individuals use different sides of their brains to process different kinds of information. Understanding brain behavior has been a significant phase of exploring the learning process. Brain behavior has especially been associated with learning styles and personality traits (Saleh, 2001).

Investigating the potential relationship between brain dominance and language learning styles thus seems to be a promising area in language learning research (Dulger, 2012). In other words, language learning strategies can be taught in a more effective way if the relationship between brain dominance and strategy use is recognized. In the last two decades, researchers have attempted to prove that making students' metacognitive learners is beneficial not only in general learning but also in

specific subject areas such as listening, writing, mathematics, social studies, and problem solving. They have also attempted to discover the metacognitive knowledge and strategies that students need to be equipped with in order to gain metacognitive awareness and make metacognitive judgments and choices (Baker & Brown, 1984; Brown, 1987; Garner, 1988; Gourgey, 2001; Hartman, 2001; Paris & Winograd, 1990; Schraw, 2001).

For instance, Eid Alhaisoni (2017) and Altuwairesi (2016) in separate studies investigated the metacognitive listening strategies among Saudi EFL students and both concluded that participants tended to use problem-solving and direct attention strategies more frequently than other metacognitive listening strategies. On the other hand, mental translation and personal knowledge strategies were reported to be the least used strategies. In a study on a group of Iranian EFL learners (Mireskandari & Alavi, 2015), the results of the investigation into differences between male and female learners revealed while participants were mostly right-brain dominant, they did not differ significantly in terms of their use of listening strategies, such as compensatory, cognitive, social and affective strategies.

Listening comprehension is a highly integrative skill in a way that it plays a very important role in the process of language learning and language acquisition (Vandergrift, 1999). Through listening, the process of learning other skills will be facilitated. Moreover, it has been argued that awareness of strategies and other variables in learning can have a positive influence on language learners' listening development (Vandergrift, 2006).

Language learning strategies have been widely discussed in

language learning research. According to research findings learners can improve their communicative language ability by using and learning certain strategies that help them to become independent learners (Nakatani, 2010). On the other hand, knowledge of brain functions of learners can help teachers and curriculum designers utilize more effective teaching procedures. It is believed that although individuals have the capacity to use both hemispheres of their brain, based on the individuals' dominance one hemisphere may take the lead (Long & Hoo 1997). The term hemisphericity is used to characterize a person's inclination to rely on one brain hemisphere more than the other, regardless of the cognitive nature of task demands (Alptekin & Atakan, 1990). For this purpose, identification of learner's strategies in light of neurolinguistic characteristics becomes significant.

In recent years, the terms metacognition and metacognitive skills have been drawing considerable attention in educational environments. Studies demonstrated that successful comprehension does not occur automatically, rather successful comprehension depends on directed cognitive efforts, referred to as metacognitive processing (Alexander & Jetton, 2000).