

Observation on how unsuccessful learners listen to English

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1. Introduction

This research is a longitudinal study on two unsuccessful EFL learners as they practiced listening comprehension in the target language over a period of ten months.



2. Background (1)

- Comprehension Monitoring in Listening
 - Checking, verifying, or correcting one's understanding at the local level.
 - A shift in depth of processing might be a significant distinction between novice listeners and intermediate listeners. (Vandergrift, 1997)
- Words and Chunks
 - Listening to individual words will not lead to attaining comprehension of the story while listening to chunks will lead to grasping the gist of the story (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990).



2. Background (2)

- Mishearing and teaching pronunciation
 - Rhythm and pitch can help learners with their listening comprehension (Gilbert, 1995).

3. Research Questions

- Is it the case that, the more proficient EFL learners become, the more they tend to comprehend the material in terms of chunks rather than words?
- Is it the case that, the more proficient EFL learners become, the more they monitor their comprehension?
- How does mishearing affect EFL learners' comprehension?



4. Method

- Participants

- Two female high school students, Yuki and Anna, both unsuccessful learners of English.
- A diagnostic test showed that neither of them had reached the average 3rd-year junior high school student's level of English. At the end of the school year, they did reach that level of English.

- Procedure

- Think-aloud protocols were collected from both students five times; in June, July, October, November, and February.
- Protocols were collected on the first three attempts by the students at listening and comprehending the material, although they were allowed to listen as many more times as they wanted.

5. Results and discussion (1)

Words and Chunks

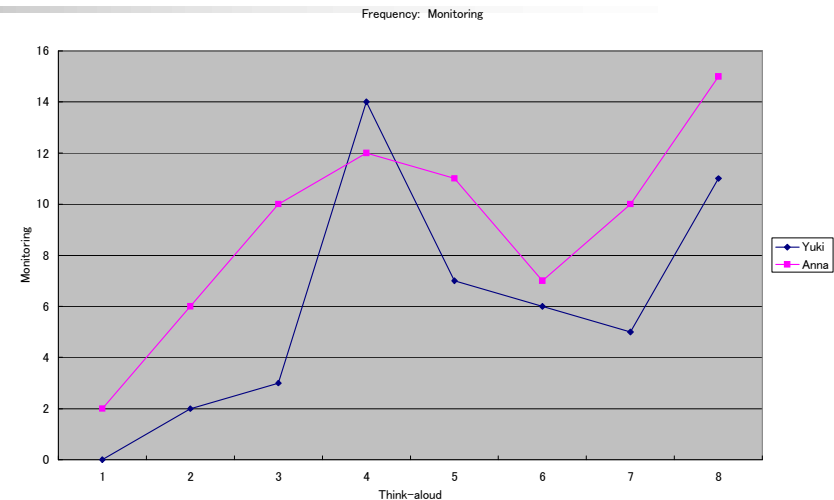
- It is not clear from these data whether it is indeed the case that, the more proficient EFL learners become, the more they tend to comprehend the material in terms of chunks rather than words.
- Anna listened to more chunks than Yuki; however, Anna could not achieve comprehension because she tended to focus on individuals words.

Date	Time	Word		Chunk	
		Yuki	Anna	Yuki	Anna
June	1	1	1	0	4
July	2	5	7	0	5
Oct	3-1	5	2	0	12
	3-2	3	7	0	0
Nov	4-1	1	5	1	6
	4-2	6	5	6	4
Feb	5-1	0	5	7	1
	5-2	1	6	4	1
	Total	22	38	18	33

5. Results and discussion (2)

Comprehension Monitoring

- Although the frequency of monitoring fluctuated, there was a general increase over the months.
- Yuki often used top-down processing: she tried to reproduce pronunciation accurately and grasp the gist of the story.



- From the protocols
 - Yuki: 'Is this a commercial? It seemed to say, "Please buy it"'
 - Anna: 'I thought "mouth" means "tasting"'

5. Results and Discussion (3)

Mishearing

- The protocols suggested that the students were unable to identify the words in the phrase even after listening to it more than three times.
- The importance of the knowledge of phonology is undeniable.
- Mishearing decreased in later protocols: both of the students were weak in
 - Knowledge of weak forms
 - Knowledge of syntax

■ Examples of mishearing

- Yuki
 - 'Fifth Avenue' → 'Fifteen minutes'
 - She identified it for the three times
- Anna
 - I'll be **back** soon.
 - Back → bag
 - She identified it for the six times.



6. Conclusions

- The frequency of comprehension monitoring seems to have increased as the students' listening comprehension improved.
- Providing students with phonological knowledge is necessary for preventing misunderstanding.
- Learner types may affect the process of comprehension.

7. References

- Vandergrift, L. (1997). The comprehension strategies of second language (French) listeners: A descriptive study. *Foreign Language Annals*, 30(3).
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- Gilbert, J. (1995). Pronunciation practice as an aid to listening comprehension. In D. J. Mendelsohn & J. Rubin (Eds.), *A guide for the teaching of second language listening*. San Diego: Dominie Press, Inc.