

Listening Strategies Employed in Comprehending the Academic English Lectures of Business English Major Students

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Abstract

This study aimed to: 1) study listening strategies used by Business English major students at Buriram Rajabhat University when attending the academic English lectures, 2) investigate the problems on listening to academic English lectures of Business English major students, and 3) find out the ways to solve the problems on listening to academic English lectures of Business English major students. The samples for quantitative data were 64 Business English major students, selected by purposive sampling technique. In addition, the samples for qualitative data were 10 Business English major students, selected by using purposive sampling technique. The instruments used to collect the data were questionnaire and semi-structured interview. The quantitative data were analyzed by using percentage, frequency, mean, and standard deviation while the qualitative data were analyzed by using content analysis technique. The findings were as follows:

1. The listening strategies used by Business English major students at Buriram Rajabhat University when attending the academic English lectures both in overall and each strategy were at a high level. When considering each strategy, it was found that the highest mean was social-affective strategy, followed by meta-cognitive strategy and cognitive strategy, respectively.

2. The problems on listening for academic English lectures of Business English major students were: 1) They do not understand the exact meanings of academic vocabulary, 2) They cannot catch the academic listening lectures, 3) The teacher speaks too fast, and 4) They do not understand the academic listening lectures, respectively.

3. The ways to solve the problems on listening for academic English lectures of Business English major students were: 1) They ask the meaning in Thai from the teacher, 2) They practice the variety of listening texts, 3) They read more the similar texts in Thai version, and 4) They ask the teacher to speak slowly respectively.

Keywords: Listening strategies, Academic English lectures, Business English major students

Introduction:

Listening is recognized as an active activity. Vandergrift (2004) has highlighted the paramount role that listening plays in language acquisition, and listening comprehension skills have begun to receive a lot more systematic

attention as a skill in its own right. In other words, all aspects of listening (e.g., as skill, process, product, and factors) are evolved and have implications and contributions in both L1 and L2 listening instructions. Although listening is seen as an important active skill, it is probably the most

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difficult one among the four macro skills to learn and to teach. Goh (2002b) mentions that successful listening for language learners depending on many factors, not least their background knowledge and their mental processing capacity.

According to Devine (1982; cited in Prajanban, 2016), listening is the primary means by which incoming ideas and information are taken in. Gilbert (1989), on the other hand, notes that students from kindergarten through high school are expected to listen 65-90 percent of the time. Wolvin and Coakley (1991) conclude that both in and out of the classroom, listening consumes more of daily communication time than other forms of verbal communication. Listening is central to the lives of students throughout all levels of educational development. Listening is the most frequently used language skill in the classroom (Ferris, 1998; Murphy, 1987). Both instructors and students acknowledge the importance of listening comprehension for success in academic settings. Numerous studies indicate that efficient listening skills are more important than other skills as a factor contributing to academic success (Wolvin and Coakley, 1991). Nevertheless, it is evident that listening is more important for the lives of students since listening is used as a primary medium of learning at all stages of education.

In EFL class, in order for EFL learners to effectively use their listening skills to learn the target language and to attain L2 content in their other academic courses, they need to develop their listening comprehension (Brown, 1987; Coakley & Wolvin, 1997). However, developing listening comprehension is not easy due to the complicated comprehension process. In that, EFL learners must decode the spoken input into meaning by utilizing their own background knowledge and that of the EFL linguistic knowledge (Byrnes, 1984; Nagle & Sanders, 1986). After that, they have to further employ interpretation to the oral input in order to gain

comprehension (Mendelsohn, 1994). Agreeing that listening comprehension consists of complicated process, Oxford (1993) further elaborates that when trying to comprehend an oral input, EFL learners have to make sure that they successfully understand all linguistic levels of the incoming input ranging from words, phrases, clauses, sentences to discourses. Along with the usage of linguistic knowledge, EFL learners have to use their background knowledge to help them comprehend the text (Vandergrift, 2003).

Listening strategies are mental processes which are utilized to learn, perceive, and remember spoken texts. In listening, a listener employs various listening strategies to make meaning of the oral input received. In employing listening strategies, a listener is demanded to use cognitive attempts to interpret sounds, figure out the word meaning, and activate background knowledge (Coskun, 2010; Abdalhamid, 2012). Listening strategies are also utilized to handle complex tasks, such as interpreting stress and discriminating between sounds in order to comprehend, learn, or maintain new information from the oral input in English (Oxford, 1990).

Not only being seen as mental processes, listening strategies are also seen as listening techniques which can help learners comprehend the oral texts. They are sorted out into three groups according to the involved processing types as follows: metacognitive, cognitive, and social-affective strategies (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Metacognitive strategies are employed by learners to actively carry out the cognitive processes involving listening to spoken input (Livingston, 1996). These strategies also relate to the learners' utilization of prior knowledge to plan strategies when handling listening tasks, apply necessary procedures to solve listening problems, reflect on and evaluate findings, and adapt their approaches as needed. Cognitive strategies are used when learners'

knowledge of vocabulary, syntax, and grammar plays a part in analyzing or comprehending the spoken messages (Rubin, 1994). In using cognitive strategies, learners apply their context and background knowledge to interpret or predict the meaning of the oral input. Social-affective strategies are used when learners work with their peers to gather information, identify a listening task, answer a problem, or receive feedback on their listening performances (Vandergrift, 1997). This includes asking the teacher for clearness and applying techniques to decrease anxiety as well (O'Malley, Chamot, & Kupper, 1989; Vandergrift, 1997). All three types of strategies are also claimed to assist students in handling problems from listening task (Wattthajarukiat, Chatupote & Sukseemuang, 2012). When students apply metacognitive or socio-affective strategies, this can make listening tasks easier to accomplish (Oxford, 1990).

For university students of all levels, employing listening strategies is a means to lessen the listening difficulty and to understand the information they hear (Oxford, 1990). This is because by using listening strategies, students can become better in learning the target language (Wattthajarukiat, Chatupote & Sukseemuang, 2012). Many studies concerning tertiary-level students revealed that the application of effective listening strategies is essential for students' academic accomplishment (Dunkel, 1991; Flowerdew, 1994; Kaplan-Dolgoy, 1998; Vandergrift, 2004). Bozorgian and Pillay (2013) state that learners can overcome the difficulty in academic lectures and the potential problems in English listening by utilizing various listening strategies. For example, Business English major students who studied "English for Thai Studies Course", although they have their background knowledge about Thailand, they cannot catch some issues lectured by their teachers.

As the importance of listening strategies mentioned above, many research works were

conducted in order to offer an understanding to the general application of listening comprehension strategies (e.g. Bacon, 1992; Goh, 2002a; Murphy, 1985, 1987; O'Malley, Chamot, & Kupper, 1989; Oxford, 1990; Rost & Ross, 1991; Vandergrift, 1993, 1996, 2003; Wu, 2007; Piamsai, 2011, Wattthajarukiat, Chatupote & Sukseemung, 2012; Prajanban, 2016). These studies investigated the listening strategies used by the learners in all levels. However, there is no research on listening strategies employed by Business English students used in their English academic lectures. It is hoped that this study will be as the guidelines for English lecturers who teach at the university level as well as the universities all over Thailand to use the research results to adapt and develop the activities for improving the students' academic listening skills. Also, the students and English learners may use these findings to improve their English academic listening.

Purposes of the Study:

- 1) To study listening strategies used by Business English major students at Buriram Rajabhat University when attending the academic English lectures.
- 2) To investigate the problems on listening to academic English lectures of Business English major students.
- 3) To find out the ways to solve the problems on listening to academic English lectures of Business English major students.

Methodology:

1. Population and Samples

The population of the study consisted 310 Business English major students studying in the first semester of the academic year 2020 at Buriram Rajabhat University, Thailand.

The samples of this study were 64 third year Business English major students studying in the first semester of the academic year 2020 at Buriram Rajabhat University, Thailand. They were



selected by purposive sampling technique with two main reasons; they studied “English for Thai Studies”, and one of the researchers was their advisor.

2. Research Instruments

1) The research instruments in this study used were a self-reported questionnaire and interview. The self-reported questionnaire which was adapted from Vandergrift (1997), Ishler (2010), and Abdalhamid (2012), consisted of three sections: personal profile, question section and open-ended form. In section one, the samples were asked to answer some general questions concerning themselves, including name, genders, and grade point average. In section two, the samples were requested to fill in the English listening strategy questionnaire with 57 statements. The 57 items were divided into three major sub-categories: meta-cognitive strategies (knowing about learning and controlling learning through planning, monitoring, and evaluating the learning activity), cognitive strategies (actual performance of language learning, such as inferencing, prediction, contextualization, using resources and perceptual processing), and social affective strategies (the regulation of feelings and attitudes such as anxiety reduction, self-encouragement, and cooperation). The samples were asked to report their using of English listening strategy on a five-point scale by ticking the number: never true of me=1, rarely true of me=2, sometimes true of me=3, often true of me=4, and always true of me=5. The higher number indicated a more frequent use of the strategy concerned. The last part was requested for the samples to write down the problems on listening in academic lectures and how to solve those problems. The instrument was tried out with a non-sample group of 42 fourth year Business English major students at BRU who used to study the “English for Thai Studies” course. The reliability value of the questionnaire was 0.923 that can be used with the sample group.

2) The semi-structured interview was employed in this study to elicit data about the problems of samples’ listening to the academic lectures and ways to solve those problems. The 5 interview questions were adapted from Ishler (2010). The interview questions were examined by the three experts to check the face validity.

3. Data Collection

3.1 Questionnaire

Before the students started to work on the questionnaire, the researchers explained the instructions. The research data were kept in confidential. A consent form for taking a questionnaire was distributed to all students of the class. Only the students who agreed to participate in the study signed the forms. Then the participants completed the questionnaire. The students were allowed to ask the researchers about technical questions or unclear information in the questionnaire during the survey. The entire procedure of administering this part was about 30 minutes, including the time spent on instructions and consent forms.

3.2 Semi-structured Interview

The final version of semi-structured interview guide was administered to 10 Business English major students. The Thai version was used to interview the samples. Each of the 10 interviewees was interviewed for approximately 5 minutes. Each interview was audio taped to ensure that all the information is recorded and can be review afterwards. After the interviews had completed, the audiotapes were transcribed.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Questionnaire

After checking the completion of each questionnaire, the data gathered from the questionnaires were statistically analyzed by using Statistic Package for Social Science (SPSS) mainly focusing on the descriptive statistic analysis i.e. alpha co-efficient, frequency, percentage, mean,



and standard deviation. The statistical devices employed in this study were as follows:

1) Alpha co-efficient of Cronbach was used to calculate the reliability of questionnaire.

2) Frequency (f) and percentage (%) were used to calculate the data of the personal information of the samples.

3) Mean (\bar{x}) and standard deviation (S.D) were used to investigate the use of each of listening strategies of Business English major students. The following criteria were employed for interpretation by Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) in table as follows:

Table 1: Three levels of interpretation proposed by Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995)

The key to understand average of usage group		
High	Always Use	3.50 or above
	Often Use	
Moderate	Occasionally Use	2.50 to 3.49
Low	Seldom Use	Below 2.50
	Never Use	

4) Content analysis technique is used to analyze the data from the open-ended form.

4.2 Semi-structured Interview

The data obtained about the problems on listening to academic English lectures and ways to solve those problems of Business English major students from the semi-structured interview were analyzed by content analysis technique.

Findings

1) English listening strategies employed by Business English major students

The English listening strategies employed in listening academic English lectures by Business English major students are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Mean, standard deviation and interpretation of English listening strategies employed by Business English major students (n=64)

English listening strategies	\bar{X}	S.D.	Interpretation
1. Meta-cognitive strategy	3.82	0.09	High
2. Cognitive strategy	3.76	0.40	High
3. Social affective strategy	3.85	0.56	High
Total	3.81	0.24	High

As shown in Table 2, it reveals that the English listening strategies employed in listening academic English lectures by Business English major students both in overall and each strategy were at a high level. The social affective strategy was used most, followed by meta-cognitive strategy and cognitive strategy, respectively.

2) Problems on Listening to Academic English Lectures of Business English Major Students

When asking the problems faced on listening to academic English lectures of Business English major students at Buriram Rajabhat University obtained from the open-ended form of the questionnaire and interview, it was found as shown in Table 3 below:

**Table 3** Problems on listening to academic English lectures of Business English major students

Statements	Frequency	Percent (%)
1. They do not understand the exact meanings of academic vocabulary.	15	33.33
2. They cannot catch the academic listening lectures.	12	26.67
3. The teacher speaks too fast.	10	22.22
4. They do not understand the academic listening lectures.	8	17.78
Total	45	100.00

As shown in Table 3, it was found that the problem on listening to academic English lectures that Business English major students faced the most was “They do not understand the exact meanings of academic vocabulary” (f=15, 33.33%), followed by “They cannot catch the academic listening lectures” (f=12, 26.67%), “The teacher speaks too fast” (f=10, 22.22%), and “They do not understand the academic listening lectures” (f=8, 17.78%), respectively.

3) Ways to Solve the Problems on Listening to Academic English Lectures of Business English Major Students

When asking the ways to solve the problems on listening to academic English lectures of Business English major students at Buriram Rajabhat University obtained from the open-ended form of questionnaire and interview, the findings are as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Ways to solve the problems on listening to academic English lectures of Business English major students

Statements	Frequency	Percent (%)
1. They do not understand the exact meanings of academic vocabulary.		
1.1 Ask the meaning in Thai from the teacher.	10	22.22
1.2 Learn more vocabulary from a variety of sources.	4	8.89
2. They cannot catch the academic listening lectures.		
2.1 Practice the variety of listening texts.	8	17.78
2.2 Pay more attention to listen to the listening texts.	4	8.89
3. The teacher speaks too fast		
3.1 Ask the teacher to speak slowly.	6	13.33
3.2 Ask the teacher to repeat his academic lectures.	3	6.67
4. They do not understand the academic listening lectures.		
4.1 Read more the similar texts in Thai version.	7	15.55
4.2 Pay more attention when listening to the teacher.	3	6.67
Total	45	100.00

As shown in Table 4, it was found that there are two ways to solve the problem of “They do not understand the exact meanings of academic vocabulary”: 1) Ask the meaning in Thai

from the teacher (f=10, 22.22%), and 2) Learn more vocabulary from a variety of sources (f=4, 8.89%). In addition to solve the problem of “They cannot catch the academic listening lectures”,

Business English major students used two ways to solve this problem, namely 1) Practice the variety of listening texts (f=8, 17.78%), and 2) Pay more attention to listen to the listening texts (f=4, 8.89%). Again, Business English major students used two ways to solve the problem “The teacher speaks too fast” including 1) Ask the teacher to speak slowly (f=6, 13.33%), and 2) Ask the teacher to repeat his academic lectures (f=3, 6.67%). Lastly, Business English major students used two ways to solve the problem “They do not understand the academic listening lectures” including 1) Read more the similar texts in Thai version (f=7, 15.55%), and 2) Pay more attention when listening to the teacher (f=3, 6.67%), respectively.

Discussion

1. English listening strategies employed by Business English major students.

The findings revealed that the use of English listening strategies in listening academic English lectures of Business English major students both in overall and each strategy was at a high level. Social affective strategy was reported to use most, followed by meta-cognitive strategy and cognitive strategy, respectively. This may be explained by the fact that Business English major students communicate in English all five weekdays, and they may use English listening in their daily conversation with teachers, friends or foreigners. Also, they mentioned that they practice English listening outside classroom such as watching TV, surfing Internet and listening to music. As a result, they used English listening strategies at a high level. Such a result of the highest strategy used of social affective, it may be explained that the Business English major students like to cooperate with their peers when they listen to the academic lectures from teachers. In addition, they may ask their friends or teacher if they do not

understand the listening texts. This finding is similar to Abdalhamid (2012) who mentioned that the Arabic-speaking ESL listeners use a great deal of social affective strategies.

2. Problems on Listening to Academic English Lectures of Business English Major Students.

The result was found that the problems on listening to academic English lectures that Business English major students faced were 1) They do not understand the exact meanings of academic vocabulary, followed by 2) They cannot catch the academic listening lectures, 3) The teacher speaks too fast, and 4) They do not understand the academic listening lectures, respectively. This could be explained that the vocabulary that they heard from the teacher are in the specific contexts, such as Thai arts, royal ceremonies, Thai traditions and customs, therefore, they cannot understand the meanings of some words. In addition, the teacher speaks very fast that makes them cannot catch and do not understand the academic listening lectures. The findings are in line with Hamouda (2013) who reported that the major problem hindering listening comprehension was that the students' vocabulary was too limited to understand the message. Also, this finding coincides with Yang and Chen (2007) and Sa' diyah (2016) who showed that unfamiliar words is one of the most important message factors for listening problems. Julamonthol (2015) and Rini (2017) claimed that unknown slang and idioms, speed of speech and insufficient English vocabulary were the major listening comprehension problems.

3. Ways to Solve the Problems on Listening to Academic English Lectures of Business English Major Students.

The findings revealed that the ways to solve the problems on listening to academic English lectures of Business English major students were: 1) They ask the meaning in Thai from the



teacher, 2) They practice the variety of listening texts, 3) They read more the similar texts in Thai version, and 4) They ask the teacher to speak slowly respectively. This could be explained by the fact that if the teacher lectures them by using the unfamiliar words, they ask the teacher to explain or give them in Thai. Moreover, the Business English major students mentioned that they looked for similar texts in Thai version and read in advance before going to the class. In terms of the teacher speaks very fast, they ask him to speak slowly. In addition, the Business English major students practice their listening from variety texts from the Internet or with the native speakers. These ways will help them solve the problems on listening to academic English lectures. This is similar to Julamonthol (2015) who stated that practicing listening skill with native speakers/ a variety of listening texts is the main way to improve the listening comprehension of learners.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study is carried out in order to provide an insight into the listening strategies employed by Business English major university students at Buriram Rajabhat University when attending the academic English lectures, problems on listening to academic English lectures of Business English major students, and ways to solve the problems on listening to academic English lectures of Business English major students. The findings from this study might be as the guidelines for developing the teaching and learning materials of ESP listening and speaking courses which lead to the improvement for all Business English major students in Buriram Rajabhat University. Also, it is anticipated that the conclusion of the present investigation might be utilized to those responsible for policy and planning as well as related to the organizations in order to have a clearer understanding of English

needs of college and university students who want to improve their English listening skills in order to communicate effectively.

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