
SCRUTINIZING STUDENTS' LISTENING STRATEGIES: CREATING MENTAL LINKAGES

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Abstract

One of memory strategies introduced by the listening lecturers in listening comprehension II at IAIN Batusangkar is creating mental linkages strategies. It is assumed that these strategies are considered to solve students' problem in listening comprehension in order to comprehend oral text. The problems of the research were what creating mental linkages strategies used in that class and how they are applied. Therefore the purposes of this research were to find out the students' creating mental linkages strategies used by students and how they applied it in listening comprehension. The research method was descriptive qualitative. All participants (74 students) were the respondents for questionnaire, and 7 students among them were selected to be interviewed. They were chosen through snowball sampling technique. The data of the research were collected by using questionnaires and interview. After analyzing the data it was found that not all of students applied creating mental linkages strategies correctly: (1) they have applied grouping strategy correctly with the percentage 55%, (2) they have applied associate/elaborating strategy correctly with the percentage 27.40%, and (3) they have applied placing new word into context strategy with the percentage 46.68%. It can be concluded that the result of the study indicates that creating mental linkages strategies are used by the students in listening comprehension need to be developed in to the correct ways to get better comprehension in listening.

Keywords: *Scrutinizing, Memory strategies, Creating Mental Linkages, Listening Comprehension.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Listening is one of the most fundamental pieces of learning and teaching English. Most of students are regarded listening as challenging skill since while they are listening, they are connecting their background knowledge and linguistic competence to bear on the information contained in the aural text. To comprehend the text, they should memorize the information quickly, they do not have much time to think. They will lose some information, if they can not remember it in whilst listening activity, they will problems in order to get best comprehension in listening.

Strategies plays an important rule to solve the problems in listening. In order to be successfully in listening, learners should come up with some strategies as Kurita (2012) says that students' own strategies for listening enables them to be successful in listening. Strategies plays an important role in English language learning. By using strategies, the students can comprehend the information quickly and effectively. They will get the meaning without spent much time to think. Vandergrift (2004) explains that students should learn to listen sothat they can better listen to learn.

One of direct strategies can be applied by students is memory strategies. Oxford (1990) conceptualizes that memory strategies are strategies to help learners store in memory, the

important things they hear in new language that enables them retrieve information from memory when they need to use it for comprehension or production. It focuses mostly on the storage function because it is the initial key to learning. Furthermore, Oxford (1990) divides memory strategies into four such as: creating mental linkages, applying image and sounds, reviewing well and employing action.

Because it is really broad strategies, this article focuses on discussing creating mental strategies. These are the most basic strategies and the foundation of more complex memory strategies. These are set of strategies that useful for making mental linkage such as: grouping, Associating/elaborating, and placing word into context. (Oxford 1990).

the use of these strategies by students in Listening comprehension class at STAIN Batusangkar still was not fully successful. They got problem to apply creating mental linkages strategies. Some of students had problem in applying these strategies in whilst listening activities. There were many problems was found related to these strategies. They got difficulties to group the information that they listened from the the text. In addition, they had a problem to relate pieces information from the text in order to create association in their memory. Finally they got problem to place new words or phrases into a context in order to help them to remember the information.

In line with the background of the study, the writer will discuss about scrutinizing students listening strategies: creating mental linkages. The problems of this study is formulated as follows: (1) What are memory strategies used by students of English department at STAIN Batusangkar in listening comprehension II, and (2) How do the students of the English Department at STAIN Batusangkar apply memory strategies in listening comprehension II?

2. REVIEW OF RELATED THEORIES

2.1. Listening Comprehension

There have been a number of attempts to define the listening skill in the literature. For instance, Nunan (2003: 4) defines that listening as “the active process to make sense”. Furthermore Brown (2004:) states “listening as a component of speaking”. He said that someone should improve his/her listening skill before mastering speaking skill. Howat and Dakin in Guo and Wills (2005:2) support Nunan and Brown opinion. They defines “listening as the ability to know and understand what the speaker said”. He explained that the listener need to process the message and they have to connect it to another information they already know.

Moreover, Rost (2002:3) claims that listening is “equal experiencing contextual effect, that is listening a neurological event (experiencing) overlays a cognitive events, that is creating a change in a representation. Rost (2002) also stresses that listening goes through a process in which the listener gets what, in fact, the speaker says, representing and structuring meaning, establishing a negotiation in meaning (with the speaker), giving response, building up meaning with the help of involvement, empathy and imagination.

Furthermore Listening comprehension is important when the listeners need to gain the message from the speaker. Without comprehension, the listeners will not understand well that the speakers are saying. The listener cannot do if she/ he does not listen carefully, concentrate on and pay attention to what the speaker say.

Comprehension is a main part of listening skill since comprehension is understanding message deeply. While listening something, listener needs to acquire the message well. According to Magnera (2010:12), listening comprehension refers to the understanding of the implications and explicit meanings of words and sentences of spoken language.

Listening comprehension is necessary to understand for the students. According to Fang (2010:15),” listening comprehension means that the listeners should be encouraged to concentrate on an active process of listening for meanings, using not only the linguistic cues but their nonlinguistic knowledge as well”. They should also know that not every clue is equally important to the message. Therefore, even when they miss a piece of language, they need not worry there is a

good chance that other clues will make them understand the message, or at least, enough of the message for their own aim. Listening comprehension is regarded theoretically as an active process in which individuals concentrate on selected aspects of aural input, form meaning from passages, and associate what they hear with existing knowledge.

From the definition above, it can be concluded that listening comprehension is the ability to understand what the speakers are saying. It is the active process to get the implicit and explicit meaning both linguistic and non linguistic knowledge.

2.2. Language Learning Strategies

Learning strategies can help the students to be successful listeners. According to Oxford (1990:8), “learning strategy is specific actions taken by the learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self directed, more effective, and more transferrable to new situations”. It can be inferred that by using strategy in learning, the students can help the students to participate actively in communication. Related to listening skill, they will be easy to comprehend what the speaker said. They will enjoy to listen because they know the way to listen. Furthermore the learning process of listening will be effective since they do not spend much time to listen and comprehend the text.

Rubin in Griffiths (2008:85) states that “language learning strategies are what students do”. It is an active approach. The active approach related to the term “actions” refers to activities that focus on what strategies they do in learning.

Bialystok in Griffiths (2008:86) describes that “language learning strategies as optional mean for exploiting available information to improve competence in a second language”. It would be seem self evident that strategies are chosen by learners, since learners who unthinkingly accept activities imposed by others can hardly be considered strategic given the emphasis on active in the learning process.

Wenden (1991:52) states that “learners use language learning strategy to regulate or control their learning”. Meanwhile Chamot, et al (1999: 2) states “learning strategies are procedures or techniques that learners can use to facilitate a learning task”. While, some learning strategies, such as taking notes or making graphic organizer are observable. Most strategies are mental processes that are not directly observable. They seem to emphasize about the learner strategy as the learner’s technique in understanding a subject matter and his or her technique will influence the mental process to comprehend that subject matter. It can be conclude that to be successful learners, the students have to apply any strategies since it is the procedure or techniques of mental process that can help them in learning.

Moreover, According to Griffith (2008:86) the goal of language learning strategies is to facilitate the learning, the target which distinguishes learning strategies from skills, a concept with which they are often confused. In other word, learning strategies are used to learn, while skills are employed to use what has been learn. The learning goal also distinguishes language learning strategies from other types of learner strategies, especially communication strategies, whose basic purpose is to maintain communication.

From the definition above, it can be inferred that the language learning strategy as the learner’s procedure and technique that facilitate him or her in learning the language or learning strategies are the mental process which learner’s employ to learn and use the target language. It can facilitate the student to achieve the goal of second language learning.

2.3. Applying Memory Strategies in Listening Comprehension

Strategies is important in listening comprehension. By using strategies in listening, the students can comprehend the text quickly. One of strategies that can be applied by the students is memory strategies. it is direct strategies that can help students in order to store the information that they listen in their memory. These strategies encourage them to retrieve information from memory when they need to use it for comprehending the text.

Schmitt (1997) in Saeid (2003) introduces the other name of memory as mnemonic. He proposes the process of learning through mnemonic more meaningfully and also deeper. Furthermore, Zainil (2006:31) defines memory strategies as set of direct strategies that have highly exotic function to help students store and retrieve new information.

According to Oxford (1990:58-) memory strategies can be divided into four strategies. The first strategy is creating mental linkages. There are three kind of strategies related to create mental linkages, they are: grouping, associating/elaborating, and placing new words into a context. Grouping involves classifying or reclassifying what is heard into meaningful groups. Associating/elaborating is strategy that can encourage the students to associate the information from the text with familiar concepts already in memory. Then, placing new words into a context is a strategy to place new words or expressions that have been heard into meaningful context.

The second strategy is applying image and sounds. this strategy can be divided into four kinds such as using imagery, semantic mapping, using keyword, and representing sounds in memory. Using imagery is strategy to remember the information from listening text by creating mental image. Semantic mapping is strategy that can be applied in listening by arranging concepts and relationships on paper to create a semantic map, a diagram in which the key concept are highlighted and are linked with related concepts via arrows or lines. Related to this strategy, Wixon (1986) in Saeid (2003) defines semantic map as concept of definition map which reflect the idea that students need to have same understanding of what a definition is and how it works before they can give the meaning of a word on their own. Using key word is strategy in listening in which the students can combines sounds and images to remember the information from listening text. Then, representing sounds in memory is strategy that can help students to remember what they listen by making auditory rather than visual representation of sounds.

The third strategy is reviewing well. This strategy can help students to review the information from listening text. It is structured reviewing, which is especially useful for remembering new material.

The last strategy is employing action. This strategy include two kinds, they are: using physical response or sensation and using mechanical techniques. The strategy of using physical response or sensation can be applied for remember the text. the students can act out what they listened, or associate physical sensations with specific words found in listening text. Furthermore, they can apply the strategy of using mechanical techniques to remember what has been listened. They can use flashcard, with new word written on one side and the definition written on the other.

In addition, Farragher-Paras (2004) in Saeid (2003) assets that memory strategies contain creating mental links, imagery, physical response, grouping/classifying, sound presentation, association and elaboration. He does not categorize memory strategies specifically as oxford, but he has different category such as physical response as one of memory strategies.

In short, Memory strategies are sets of strategies that can be applied in listening comprehension in order to encourage the students to memorize the information quickly. By applying these strategies it helps them to comprehend listening text well.

Applying Creating Mental Linkages Strategies in Listening Comprehension

Oxford (1990) conceptualize Creating mental linkages strategies as kind of memory strategies that handy for students for making mental linkages by grouping, associating/elaborating, and placing new words into context. It can be applied by the students to improve their listening comprehension.

The first strategy of creating mental linkages is grouping. The students can apply grouping strategies in listening. It enables for classifying or reclassifying what is hear into meaningful groups, thus number of unrelated elements. It sometimes involves the groups, as well. For example: If they listen about computers, they can write down the important words such as computer science, screen, keyboard, central processing unit than group these words. Than they can categorize the words the listened grammatically and labels these categories into pronouns,

adjective, adverbs. Group can be based types of word (e.g. all nouns or verbs), topic (e.g., words about weather), practical function (e.g., terms for thing that make a car work), linguistic function (e.g., apology, request, demand), similarity (e.g., warm hot, tepid, tropical), dissimilarity or opposition (e.g., friendly/unfriendly), the way one feels about something (e.g., like, dislike), and so on. The power of this strategy is enhanced by labeling the groups, using acronyms to remember the groups or using different colors to represent different group.

The second strategy of creating mental linkages is associating or elaborating. This strategy implicate associating new information with familiar concepts already in memory. It is probable to strengthen comprehension, as well as making the information easier to remember. For instance, a student listen word “*billboard*”. She/he associates it with previously learned word, *board*, used for displaying, therefore she/he understands and remember *billboard* more effectively. These association can be simple or complex, mundane or strange, but they must be meaningful to the students. Associations can be between two thing, such as bread and butter, or they can be in the form of a multipart “development,” such as school-book-paper-tree-country-earth (10) They can also be part of a network, such as a semantic map.

The last strategy of creating mental linkages is placing new words into context. When the student listen the text, they can apply this strategy by placing new word or expression that have been heard into a meaningful context as a way of remembering it. For example, a students listen the name of *Great Lakes* in the United States and want to remember them. he uses the acronym “*HOMES*” Standing for Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior) and puts it the context of the spoken sentence, “ My *HOMES*’s on the Great Lakes”. This strategy is not the same as guessing intelligently, a set of compensation strategies which involve using possible clues including the context to guess the meaning.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research was designed as descriptive qualitative research, as Gay (2000: 16) describes that qualitative research seeks to probe deeply into the research setting in order to obtain understanding about the way things are, why they are that way and how the participants in the context perceive them. This research was descriptive qualitative research related in listening comprehension. It observed what creating mental linkages strategies used by students, and how they apply these strategies in listening comprehension

The research was carried out at STAIN Batusangkar. The participants of the research were the English Students who learn listening comprehension II at STAIN Batusangkar. All participants (74 students) were the respondents for questionnaire, and 15 students among them are selected to be interviewed had been chosen by using purposive snowball sampling technique

In this research the researcher is the key instrument interview and questionnaire. The pre-observation is done before the observation, in order to collect the data in the real activity. The reseacher used two instruments during the research, they were: interview, and questioner.

To collect the data she used interview to obtain data and to explain what creating mental linkages strategies used by student, how they applied it in listening comprehension. The researcher asked the students in order to know their response, opinion or impression in using the strategies in listening comprehension. According to Gay (2009:370), interview permits researcher to obtain important data can not acquire from observation alone; although pairing observations and interviews provide a valuable way to gather complementary data. Furthermore, he states that interview can provide information that is inaccessible through observation. Interview is addressed to the students as the interviewee. To do the interview, the researcher used interview guide based on the categories and sub categories of creating mental linkages strategies. She also used questionnaire to gain information about what creating mental linkages strategies are used by students and how students apply it in listening comprehension. The researcher used open close

questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed by using the indicator of creating mental linkages strategies as proposed by Oxford (1990) they are:

Dealing with the instruments, there are two criteria for measuring instruments; they are validity and reliability. The validity of the data in this research was validated through triangulation. In this research, the researcher collected the data from three instruments; they were the data from interview, and questionnaire. Triangulation is the process to check the data from three instruments. The researcher compared the data from interview, the data from questionnaire to get the validity of the data in this research. Gay (2009:154) states that “validity refers to the degree to which a test measures what it is supposed to measure”. In other words, The test is appropriate, meaningful and useful for the purpose of the assesment. In addition, Cresswell (2008:) states that “in qualitatif research, the data can be validated through triangulation. Triangulation is a process of corroborating evidence from different individual (interview, questionnaire, document, etc) in descriptions and themes in qualitative research”. It means the data which are collected will be valid if one of the the three methods of triangulation is applied. Two instruments were used in this research. Than she checked the reliability of the instrument by repeating the questionnaire to the same participants after period of time. According to Ary (1985:357) “ it is also possible to repeat a questionnaire or interview with the same individuals after a period of time or to administer two different forms of the questionnaire to the same individual”. Gay states that “reliability is the degree to which a test consistently measures whatever it is measuring”. It can be concluded that if the same test is given to the same test takers, on matched test takers on two different occasions, the test should has similar result.

After collecting the data, the researcher analyzed them. It is the process to search, arrange, categorize, and interpret the data from interview, questionnaire and documentation systematically by using any procedures. To analyze the data, she used procedures who introduced by Miles and Hiberman (1984:21-22), they are: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction related to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying and abstracting as well as transforming the raw are gained in the research. There are many process of data reduction such as: doing summaries, coding, teasing out themes, making clusters, making partition, and writing memos. The data transforming process continues after fieldwork, and until final report is complete. The Researcher grouped the data based on the way she is gained. She classified the data into three group, they are data from interview, questionnaire and documentation. The researcher did data reduction classifying the data as from interview and questionnaire. She made the transcript of the data from interview, played the recording of interview data many times to check the transcript of the data and typed the transcription of the data and she classified it based on creating mental linkages strategies used by the students in listening comprehension III. Then, she classified the data from questionnaire based on the indicator and sub indicator of creating mental linkages strategies.

The second activity of analysis is data display. The data gained is perform and organize that permit conclusion drawing and acting taking. The data from interview was displayed in narrative text and the data from questionnaire was displayed in the form of table narrative text.

The last step is conclusion drawing or verification. Sugiono (2005:99) says that the conclusion in the qualitative research can be in form of description about the object of the research. The researcher verified the data by using triangulation to check and compare the two of the data of this research in order to get the conclusion. She also made the conclusion based theories of memory strategies in listening comprehension.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

In this data analysis, the data of students creating mental linkages strategies in listening comprehension II at STAIN Batusangkar were analyzed based on two points, they are; Creating mental linkages strategies used by students, and the way they applied these strategies.

1. Creating mental linkages strategies used by students in listening comprehension

Based on data description the students have applied creating mental linkages strategies. They have applied grouping, associating/elaborating and placing new words into a context. The percentage of students used those strategies can be display in the following tabl

Table 1
Students Percentage on Applying Creating mental linkages strategies

No	Strategies	Informant		Percentage	
		Used	Not used	Used	Not used
1	Grouping	66	7	90.41%	9.59%
2	Associating/elaborating	60	13	82.19%	17.81%
3	Placing new words into a contex	54	19	73.97%	26.03

from the table above it can be analyzed that students applied grouping strategy with the percentage 90.41%. The students who applied associating strategy was 82.19%. beside, the students who applied placing new words into context was 73.97%. From the three strategies, grouping was familiar for the students because just 7 students who did not apply it in listening comprehension. The data also showed that 9.59 % students did not apply grouping strategy, 17.81% of students did not apply associating/ elaborating strategy, and 26.03% of students did not apply placing new words into a context.

2. The way the students apply creating mental linkages strategies in listening comprehension

The student have applied creating mental lincages strategies. Based on the data description, they have done many ways to apply these strategies. Not all of the students applied it correctly. To know the percentage of students applying it could be seen in the following table:

Table 2
Students' Percentage on Applying Creating Mental Linckages Strategies

No	Strategies	Informant			Percentage (%)		
		correct	Incorrect	Notused	correct	Incorect	Notused
1	Grouping	55	13	5	75.34	17.81	6.85
2	Associating/ela borating	20	40	13	27.40	54.79	17.81
3	Placing new words into a contex	34	15	14	46.58	20.55	19.18

The students have applied grouping strategy correctly with the percentage 55%. Based on data description, the way they apply this starategies such as: (1) Remember the words and relate it with the next information, (2) Associate known vocabulary with other vocabulary, (3) Associate known vocabulary with other vocabulary, and (4) Comprehending the words and replace it with easy word.

In addition, the students have applied associate/elaborating strategy correctly with the percentage 27.40 %. The way they applied the strategy such as: (1) remembering the words and relate it with the next information, (2)Associate known vocabulary with other vocabulary, and (3) comprehending the words and replace it with easy word.

Finally, the students have applied placing new word into context. From the table above, it could be seen 46.68 % of students have applied it correctly. they have applied it by remembering the information based on context and comparing the content of the text with the context.

5. DISCUSSION

The result of this study provide evidence that the students mostly used listening strategies of creating mental linkages in listening comprehension class. 90, 41% of them applied grouping strategy but just 55 % of them applied it in the correct way. From the finding, it can be assumed that about 45% of the students did not applied it correctly. The fact show us most of students do not understand how to apply it well. It can be a problem in comprehending the oral text, so that to solve the problems, the teachers have a big responsibility to guide the students to apply this strategy correctly. They can give awareness to the students how important this strategy to memorize the information, and teach them the way they apply it. 55% of students who applied this strategy correctly have paid attention using this strategy in listening class. They follow the teacher instruction and mostly used this strategy not only in intensive listening but also extensive listening. They have good awareness to apply it and know the importance of this strategy, so that it enable them to memorize the information quickly. This finding line with Oxford (1990) who explains that grouping strategy useful for students to memorize the information by grouping the information and labeling the groups, as well.

Next, the finding show that 82,19 % of students applied associating strategy in listening comprehension, but just 27.40 % applied it correctly. The finding show the evidence that 54.79% of students don't have good understanding in applying this strategy in listening comprehension. there are many obstacle in whilst listening activity. When they are listening oral text they just focus to the information they knew, the can not associate the information correctly. Limited vocabularies also make them difficult to associate the information as Field (2003) explains that learners know the words, but they get wrong sense. As a matter of fact, 27.40 % of them understand how to apply this strategy correctly since they follows the instruction from the teachers and do not have any barrier in listening. Their background knowledge, and linguistic knowledge support them to understand and using this strategy so that they can grasp the idea and remember the information by associating one piece information to another weather simple or complex. What they did line with theories introduced by Oxford (1990) who states that associating strategy contribute students to memorize the information, it entangles associating new information with familiar concept already in memory.

The last finding show the evidence that 73.97 % of students applied placing new words into context strategy, however just 46.68 % of them applied this strategy correctly. They can play this strategy effectively if they have good background knowledge so that they can place new words into correct situation and context. They can link the new information with a context to memorize the information quickly as Oxford (1990) explains that the students can memorize the information that they heard by placing new words or expression into meaningful context. The students, who still doubt applying this strategy, mostly have strategy barrier. They forgetting to activate strategy they learned, having problems conducting the proper strategies and even being unable to comprehend the text after applying strategy.

6. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

As seen from the result obtained the study done about scrutinizing students listening strategies of creating mental linkages of English department students at STAIN Batusangkar, it's been understood that mostly students still have problems to apply creating mental linkages strategies correctly since they still have strategies barriers. This strategies should be paid both of students and teacher. The students learn more how to apply it correctly and the teachers can guide their students to apply it by using creating mental linkages' strategies instruction in the classroom.

Beside, to implement these strategies, the students should prepare themselves with good background knowledge and linguistic knowledge in order to solve the obstacle of applying these strategies in listening comprehension.

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