

## EFL Saudi Undergraduate Students' Use of Metacognitive Listening Strategies

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### **Abstract**

The main intent of the present study is to investigate the metacognitive listening strategies used by female Saudi students at the College of Languages & Translation (henceforth COLT) at King Saud University (henceforth KSU) in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, when listening to texts in English. Two main research questions have been explored in the study: (1) Which of the five major types of metacognitive strategies do the participants use most when listening to English texts? and (2) What are the metacognitive listening strategies used most by the target group when listening to English texts? The Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire has been used to arrive at answers to the two research questions. Participants are 82 students from the same cohort. Results indicate that the participants (N=82) use problem-solving and directed attention strategies more commonly than the other metacognitive listening strategies; mental translation and person knowledge strategies are the least used by the participants.

**Keywords:** EFL listening, learning strategies, metacognitive awareness listening questionnaire (MALQ), Saudi female university students

## Introduction

Listening is a language skill that has long been neglected and undervalued by both teachers and researchers (Field, 2008, p. 1; Oxford, 1993, p. 205). The “*Cinderella*” of the four language skills has been treated as a secondary skill and as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself (Nunan, 2002, p. 238). “Until recently,” Richards and Renandya (2002) believe, “the nature of listening in a second language was ignored by applied linguists” (p.235). The contention among researchers nowadays, Graham (2003) says, is “that listening in a foreign language is a complex but underestimated skill” (p. 64). In the past, listening was believed to be “a passive activity, meriting little classroom attention” (Vandergrift, 2004, p. 3). It was not until the 1960s, which witnessed emphasis on oral language skills, that listening was given a boost (Nunan, 2002, p. 238). However, Rost (2001) states that “since 1980, listening has been viewed as a primary vehicle for language learning” (p. 8).

One justification for the downgrade of listening, according to Field (2008), “is the difficulty of teaching it” (p.1). He explains that listening is a skill that takes place in the “hidden reaches of the learner's mind.” Furthermore, it is not tangible compared to the skills of speaking and writing, nor is a listening text “easily manipulated like a reading one” (Field, 2008, p. 1). These factors shed light on the complex nature of listening comprehension and explain, to some extent, why it has long been overlooked by researchers and classroom teachers. It also explains why, as Field believes, students consider “listening as the area about which they feel most insecure” (p. 4). This particular reason motivated the researcher to look for ways to help students feel more confident when listening in English. As Vandergrift (2007) explains “research into L2 listening is important because a better understanding of the process will inform pedagogy” (p. 191). The reason why the focus of this study is particularly on metacognitive listening strategies, rather than any other type of strategies, is that this group is believed to play a vital role in facilitating language learning, for they “oversee, regulate, or direct the language learning process” (Vandergrift, 1999, p. 170).

## Listening Processes

Vandergrift (2004) believes that “listening instruction is expanding from a focus on the product of listening (listening to learn) to include a focus on the process (learning to listen)” (p.3). He further explains that learners need to *learn to listen* in order to be able to *listen to learn*. Researchers distinguish between bottom-up and top-down processes, which, are “sometimes associated loosely with 'decoding' and 'meaning building’” (Field, 2008, p. 132). According to Buck (2001), the two terms are used to refer to the order of the different types of knowledge a listener applies during comprehension (p. 2). Field (2004) says that they “mark a distinction between information derived from perceptual sources and information derived from contextual ones” (p. 364). Lynch (2006) also explains that these two processes are “the conventional way of describing the use made of the internal and external resources available to listener” (p. 92). Rost (2006) also argues that these two areas have a direct impact on L2 listening instruction (p. 65), hence it becomes important for teachers to make sense of these processes.

Lynch and Mendelsohn (2002) explain that bottom-up processing “involves piecing together the parts of what is being heard in a linear fashion, one by one, in sequence” (p. 197). This process, Nunan (2002) states, is a linear one in a sense that “meaning itself is derived as the last step in the process” (p. 239). However, Field (2008) argues that “because listening is online,

we cannot assume that there is an easy 'bottom-up' progression from sounds to syllables to words to phrases" (p. 132).

On the other hand, top-down processing, Lynch and Mendelsohn (2002) say "is in some ways the converse of bottom-up" (p. 197). It is, they say, "holistic, going from whole to part, and focused on interpretation of meaning rather than recognition of sounds, words and sentences" (p.197). In top-down processing, Nunan (2002) explains, "the listener actively constructs (or, more accurately, reconstructs) the original meaning of the speaker using incoming sounds as clues" (p. 239). Here, Lynch (2006) says, listeners rely on what is already known to help make sense of what is heard (p. 93). However, Field (2008) notes that context here can serve one of two very different purposes: either to "compensate for gaps in understanding or to enrich a fully decoded message" (p. 132).

Nevertheless, "both research and daily experience," Buck (2001) says, "indicate that the processing of the different types of knowledge does not occur in a fixed sequence, but rather, that different types of processing may occur simultaneously, or in any convenient order" (p. 2). "A competent listener," Lynch and Mendelsohn (2002) explain, "uses both of these kinds of processes in order to fully comprehend spoken language" (p. 197). Yet, Vandergrift (2004) believes that "the degree to which listeners may use one process more than another will depend on the purpose for listening" (p. 4). In terms of teaching, Lynch (2006) argues that "listening skills teachers should not regard the approaches as mutually exclusive but as essentially complementary" (p. 92). He also states that "efficient listening involves the integration of whatever top and bottom information the listener is able to exploit" (p. 104). Hence, listening teachers should encourage their learners to use both approaches in an interactive way.

### **Language Learning Strategies**

Research indicates that effective learners make use of learning strategies more often and they even have a wider repertoire of strategies when compared to their less effective peers (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). According to Rost (2002), the two terms 'strategy' and 'learning strategy' have been used in the literature of applied linguistics in various senses. He further explains that these two terms have been used to refer to "a range of goal-directed plans and behaviors and have encompassed all 'thoughts and actions that assist learning'" (p. 154). Learning strategies are more precisely defined as "mental processes that are activated in order to understand new information that is ambiguous or to learn or retain new information" (O'Malley et al., 1989, p. 422). What characterizes learning strategies, O'Malley et al. state (1989), is that they are "are conscious and they are intended to enhance comprehension, learning, or retention" (p. 422). However, even though learning strategies have been under investigation for some time now, "what learner strategies actually are," Macaro (2001) believes, "has been difficult to define at an international level and with full consensus" (p. 18).

Rost (2002) notes that "the most widely agreed-upon classes of language use strategies" are social, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies (p. 154). This is the classification adopted in this paper, for as O'Malley and Chamot (1990) explain "the classification scheme based on a division of learning strategies into three categories . . . is useful in describing the strategies derived from both retrospective and think-aloud interviews" (p. 144). Yet, one problem with such classification is that "a learner's use of what is ostensibly a single strategy may actually

represent a continual shifting or 'dance' from one of these categories to another" (Cohen & Dörnyei, 2002, p. 181).

Vandergrift (1999) states that learning strategies "are useful tools for students because they open up more reliable and less frustrating routes to language learning success" (p. 174). Chamot (2005) believes that the importance of learning strategies in second language learning and teaching is due to two reasons: one is that investigating the strategies used by second language learners during the language learning process helps gain insight into the various processes involved in language learning. The other reason is that by identifying the strategies used by successful second language learners, less successful ones can be inspired with and taught new strategies which will help them become better language learners (p.112). Nonetheless, to fulfill the aim of this paper, the focus of the following part will be merely on one type of learning strategies, i.e. metacognitive strategies.

### Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognition, according to Vandergrift et al. (2006), is "a construct that refers to thinking about one's thinking or the human ability to be conscious of one's mental processes" (pp. 432-433). The term was first coined by Flavell in the 1970s and refers to "an individual's awareness of thinking and learning" (Goh, 2008, p. 192). "Metacognition," Chamot (2005) says, "is believed to involve both declarative (self-knowledge, world knowledge, task knowledge, strategy knowledge) and procedural knowledge (planning for learning, monitoring a learning task while it is in progress, and evaluating learning once a task has been completed)" (p. 124). Evidence indicates that metacognition is one significant contributor to variance in L2 listening (Vandergrift, 2007, p. 205).

Cohen and Dörnyei (2002) note that metacognitive strategies refer to "those processes which learners consciously use in order to supervise or manage their language learning," which "allow learners to control their own cognition by planning what they will do, checking how it is going and then evaluating how it went" (p. 181). Oxford (2001) says that this type of strategies helps learners "manage themselves as learners, the general learning process, and specific learning tasks" (p. 167). Since metacognitive strategies are related to such essential variables in learning, i.e. the learner, learning in general and particular learning tasks, it becomes evident why researchers argue for the importance of investigating this type of strategies. Furthermore, investing classroom time in them enables language teachers to equip their students with 'empowering' tools (Anderson, 2002). Anderson (2002) elaborates on this point by stating that "the use of metacognitive strategies ignites one's thinking and can lead to more profound learning and improved performance, especially among learners who are struggling" (p. 2), all of which are aims of any language teacher and learner as well.

Anderson (2002) identifies five major components metacognitive strategies are composed of, which include "preparing and planning for learning, selecting and using learning strategies, monitoring strategy use, orchestrating various strategies and evaluating strategy use and learning" (p. 1). This relates to some extent to the declarative and procedural knowledge involved in metacognition, mentioned by Chamot (2005), in which planning, monitoring and evaluating forms the procedural knowledge, whereas selecting, using and orchestrating strategies form part of the declarative knowledge. However, researchers in the area classify metacognitive

strategies into three main groups: planning, monitoring and evaluation (Rost, 2002, p. 156; Goh, 2008, p. 198). Under each main group, a number of sub-categories belong: planning includes advanced organization, directed attention, selective attention, and self-management; monitoring includes comprehension monitoring, auditory monitoring, and task monitoring; evaluation has under it performance evaluation and problem identification.

### Studies on Metacognitive Listening Strategies

Among the first studies carried out in the field of L2 listening is one by O'Malley, Chamot and Küpper (1989) who attempted to identify listening strategies used by 11 intermediate level high-school-age students while performing a listening task through the use of a think-aloud procedure. The researchers gathered information from both effective and ineffective listeners as an attempt to identify differences in the degree and character of learning strategy use between these two groups of learners. They also tried to examine the different phases of listening comprehension and the types of strategies used in each phase. Results of the study demonstrate a picture of listening comprehension "consistent with the depiction of general comprehension processes in the cognitive literature" (p.434). The study also indicates that strategies students use vary depending on the phase in the listening comprehension process. In the perceptual processing stage, learners use selective attention and self-monitoring; in the parsing stage, grouping and inferencing are used while during utilization, students use elaboration. Another result of the study is that effective listeners used strategies more successfully than ineffective ones.

On the other hand, a study by Vandergrift (2003) investigates the listening strategy applications of 36 grade 7 students learning French. The study looks into the types of strategies used and the differences in strategy use between more skilled and less skilled listeners. The study uses think-aloud protocols in which the subjects had to listen to a text in French and verbalize their thoughts while listening. Results indicate that participants used all types of metacognitive strategies recognized in the literature, including: planning strategies, monitoring strategies and problem identification strategies. The only type not used was evaluation strategies. The results also indicate that more skilled listeners used metacognitive strategies more frequently than less skilled listeners. Furthermore, less skilled listeners seemed to engage more in on-line translating, which is a bottom-up approach to listening.

Goh and Taib (2006) conducted a small-scale study on 10 primary school pupils regarding the effect metacognitive instruction has on listening. One of the main aims of the study was to elicit and identify the subjects' metacognitive knowledge about listening in English. Learners were asked about the factors that influenced their listening. They were also required to observe how they had tried to understand the listening input. By doing this, the researchers aimed at examining the subjects' task knowledge and strategy knowledge respectively, which are two types of metacognitive knowledge. The study demonstrates that the four most commonly reported strategies are planning, directed attention, selective attention and inferencing, which is regarded as a cognitive strategy. Results of the study also show that the participants had limited knowledge of comprehension strategies. However, comparing the pupils' scores on listening tests before and after receiving metacognitive instruction, all but one pupil showed improvement in the second round of testing. The authors further conclude that "metacognitive instruction also

reduces language anxiety and builds confidence when approaching listening tasks” (2006, p. 230).

### **Research Design**

According to Vandergrift et al. (2006), among the various procedures used to elicit learners' metacognitive knowledge about listening, the most commonly used are diaries, interviews and questionnaires (p. 436). However, Oxford (1996) states that “questionnaires are among the most efficient and comprehensive ways to assess frequency of language learning strategy use” (p. 25). Questionnaires have been widely used in studies on listening strategies like Goh (2002), Vandergrift (2005), and Vogely (1995). Hence, the instrument used to answer the two research questions of this study is a questionnaire adapted from Vandergrift et al. (2006).

### **Participants**

Participants of the study were level four female Saudi students at COLT at KSU in Riyadh. They were all doing their bachelor's degree in English language and translation, and were taking their last listening course during their course of study, which is ten levels. The reason for targeting level four students, in particular, was that they were expected to have gained experience in the use of listening strategies through the listening courses they have already completed and, thus, be more articulate in that area. The questionnaire has been administered to around 84 students. All participants were around 19 -20 years old and their anticipated length of exposure to English ranged between 8 –14 years. They shared the same mother tongue, i.e. Arabic. Sharing the same mother tongue made it easier to administer the questionnaire in the participants' first language.

### **Research Questions**

As previously mentioned, listening is an under-researched skill. This lack of research resulted in listening being “the least understood” despite it being “at the heart of language learning” (Vandergrift, 2007, p. 191). Goh (2008) explains that the focus of listening instruction since the 1990s has shifted towards “the use of listening strategies for enhancing comprehension and coping with problems” (p. 190). In particular, she states that “research into metacognitive awareness about listening is still relatively new” (p. 195). Hence, this study aimed at filling in a gap in this area, with the intent of answering the following research questions:

**RQ1:** Which of the five major types of metacognitive strategies do level four female Saudi students at COLT at KSU use most when listening to English texts?

**RQ2:** What are the metacognitive listening strategies used most by level four female Saudi students at COLT at KSU when listening to English texts?

### **Data Collection**

The questionnaire used in this study is a translated version of the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (henceforth MALQ) developed and validated by Vandergrift et al. (2006). This questionnaire, according to the authors, is a “self-report measure for assessing L2 listeners' metacognitive awareness and use of strategies when listening to oral texts” (p. 438). The only change the researcher introduced to the questionnaire is the number of options participants have to choose from; the original is a six-point Likert scale, while the one used in

this study is a four-point Likert scale. Vandergrift et al. (2006) state that the purpose of using the instrument is what informed their decision in regards to this point. They explain that “the ultimate purpose of the instrument was to track development of metacognitive awareness for purposes of either self-assessment or research.” (p. 440). Tracking learners' development is clearly not the purpose behind this study; hence the researcher felt the need for change. A five-point Likert scale was not opted for in order not to give participants a chance to hedge.

### ***Data Analysis***

The cohort target group included 120 students, but the number of participants in this study was 84, which represents 70 percent of the total number of students and is the number the researcher was able to get hold of. The questionnaires were subject to inclusion & exclusion criteria (data treatment), of which (2) questionnaires were excluded for being totally incomplete. At the end, the total number of questionnaires that were fulfilling to be entered for SPSS analysis was 82, which represents a percentage of 91.11 percent of the total number of questionnaires distributed.

To summarize the metacognitive listening strategies of the whole target population, it would be informative to examine the frequencies of strategy use first according to the five factors identified by Vandergrift et al. (2006), i.e. problem-solving, person knowledge, mental translation, planning and evaluation and directed attention. The means and standard deviations of each factor were calculated in order to arrive at an answer to the first research question. Then the 21 items which the questionnaire is composed of were examined in terms of means and standard deviations in order to answer the second research question.

### ***Results***

***RQ1:*** Which of the five major types of metacognitive strategies do level four female Saudi students at COLT at KSU use most when listening to English texts?

The participants report the use of problem solving and directed attention strategies more than the other types of metacognitive listening strategies. Another major finding related to this question is that mental translation and person knowledge strategies are the least metacognitive listening strategies used by the target group.

Regarding the individual strategies that belong under the problem-solving group (Table 1), item 5, which is *the use of known words to guess the meanings of unknown ones*, is the most commonly used strategy by the subjects (M =3.45), with most participants (96.4%) on the agree side of the continuum. *Using the general idea of the text to guess the meaning of unknown words* is another strategy favored by the participants of the study (M= 3.35) with most subjects again on the positive side of the scale (93.9%). *Use of general knowledge and experience to help understand the text* is another strategy commonly used by the target group (M=3.26). The remaining three strategies in this group did not show any significant means, which entails that not a large number of the target group favor the use of these strategies.

**Table 1** Distribution of the target population according to problem-solving strategies, N=82

Items	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Mean	Standard Deviation	Order
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%			
5. I use the words I understand to guess the meaning of the words I don't understand.	40	48.8	39	47.6	3	3.7	0	0.0	3.45	0.57	1
7. As I listen, I compare what I understand with what I know about the topic.	26	31.7	43	52.4	10	12.2	3	3.7	3.12	0.76	4
9. I use my experience and knowledge to help me understand.	31	37.8	42	51.2	8	9.8	1	1.2	3.26	0.68	3
13. As I listen, I quickly adjust my interpretation if I realize that it is not correct.	20	24.4	49	59.8	12	14.6	1	1.2	3.07	0.66	5
17. I use the general idea of the text to help me guess the meaning of the words that I don't.	34	41.5	43	52.4	5	6.1	0	0.0	3.35	0.60	2
19. When I guess the meaning of a word, I think back to everything else that I have heard, to see if my guess makes sense.	21	25.6	47	57.3	12	14.6	2	2.4	3.06	0.71	6
<b>Total Arithmetic Mean</b>	<b>3.22</b>										
<b>Standard. Deviation</b>	<b>0.41</b>										

As for directed attention strategies (Table 2), which is the second group of metacognitive strategies with the highest means, the use of *focusing harder on the text when having trouble understanding* (M= 3.54) is reported by almost all participants in the target group (98.8%). Another strategy commonly used by the target population is *trying to get back on track when losing concentration* (M=3.29), with most participants on the agree side of the continuum



(95.1%). Furthermore, participants also report the use of *recovering concentration when their minds wander while listening* (M=3.02). The only strategy in this group that is not commonly used by participants is *giving up when having difficulty listening* (M=1.84), with a very low mean compared to the other strategies in this group.

**Table 2** Distribution of the target population according to the directed attention strategies, N=82

Items	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Mean	Standard Deviation	Order
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%			
2. I focus harder on the text when I have trouble understanding.	45	54.9	36	43.9	1	1.2	0	0.0	3.54	0.53	1
6. When my mind wanders, I recover my concentration right away.	22	26.8	42	51.2	16	19.5	2	2.4	3.02	0.75	3
12. I try to get back on track when I lose concentration.	28	34.1	50	61.0	4	4.9	0	0.0	3.29	0.56	2
16. When I have difficulty understanding what I hear, I give up and stop listening.	2	2.4	17	20.7	29	35.4	34	41.5	1.84	0.84	4
<b>Total Arithmetic Mean</b>	<b>2.92</b>										
<b>Standard. Deviation</b>	<b>0.36</b>										

**RQ2:** What are the metacognitive listening strategies used most by level four female Saudi students at COLT at KSU when listening to English texts?

Among the 21 items in the questionnaire which is used to investigate the metacognitive listening strategies of the target group, 13 items have been reported to be used more commonly than the other strategies by participants (see Appendix). Most participants agree on the use of *focusing harder on the text when having trouble understanding* (M= 3.54), *using known words to guess the meanings of unknown ones* (M =3.45), *using the general idea of the text to guess the meaning of unknown words* (M= 3.35) and *trying to get back on track when losing concentration* (M=3.29). The target group also favor the use of strategies like: *using general knowledge and experience to help understand the text* (M=3.26), and *comparing what has been understood so far with what is known about the topic* (M=3.12). Many participants report *feeling that listening*

*comprehension in English is a challenge* for them (M=3.09), which is a type of person-knowledge strategy. Other strategies include: *thinking back after listening on how I have listened and what can be done differently next time* (M=3.09), *adjusting my interpretation while listening when realizing it is incorrect* (M=3.07), *thinking back on everything heard when guessing the meaning of a word* (M=3.06), *having a goal in mind while listening* (M=3.04), *recovering concentration when my mind wanders while listening* (M=3.02) and *having a plan in head before starting to listen* (M=2.89).

## Discussion

The results of the study demonstrate that the participants (N=82) use problem-solving and directed attention strategies more commonly than the other metacognitive listening strategies; mental translation and person knowledge strategies are the least used by the participants. Another major finding is that among the 21 items that compose the MALQ, 13 items are used more commonly by the target population. Interestingly, most of these 13 items belong under the problem-solving and directed attention factors, which suggests some kind of correlation and harmony between the results of the two questions of the study.

In terms of the five groups, problem-solving strategies appear at the top of the pyramid and is the group of strategies most favored by participants. When strategies were compared individually to answer the second research question, all six strategies belonging under this factor have been reported among the most commonly used strategies by the target population. Most participants report making use of linguistic cues (N=79) and the general gist of the text (N=77) to deduce the meanings of unknown words. Another large sample of the population (N=73) report using their experience and schemata knowledge to help them understand the text.

Problem-solving, according to Vandergrift et al. (2006), “represents a group of strategies used by listeners to inference . . . and to monitor these inferences” (p. 450). Chamot and Küpper (1989, cited in Graham, 2003) reported that among their subjects, which were university level students of Russian, comprehension monitoring and problem identification strategies were more frequently used by effective listeners than ineffective ones. Both types of strategies are related to the factor of problem solving in the MALQ, for inferencing is the way students deal with words or ideas that might cause them some listening comprehension problems. In a study that investigated the listening strategies used by French L2 listeners, Vandergrift (1997) found that “comprehension monitoring appears to be the metacognitive strategy reported most often” (p. 396). Furthermore, Berne (2004) reviewed the findings of a number of studies that were concerned with differences between more and less-proficient listeners. In regards to problem-solving strategies, she concluded that more proficient listeners are able to “guess the meanings of words” and “relate what they hear to previous experiences” whereas less-proficient listeners “make fewer inferences” and “do not verify their assumptions” (p.525).

Directed attention, on the other hand, is the second group of metacognitive listening strategies most commonly used by the target population. Under this factor belongs four individual strategies, of which three have been reported to be commonly used by the participants when the 21 items of the MALQ were compared on an individual basis. The only strategy of this group which is not favored by the subjects is *giving up and stopping listening when having difficulty understanding*. This strategy has a negative connotation and not using it is a good sign.

However, it is related in some way to the first most common directed attention strategy used by the subjects, which is *focusing harder on the text when having trouble understanding*. The two strategies are mutually exclusive, which suggests, to some degree, the validity of the questionnaire results. Most participants, instead of giving up when facing any kind of difficulty, carry on listening and try to focus harder on the text.

Directed attention is defined by Vandergrift et al. (2006) as “strategies that listeners use to concentrate and stay on the task” (p. 451). However, it is defined in a taxonomy developed by Vandergrift (1997) as “deciding in advance to attend in general to the listening task and to ignore irrelevant distractors; maintaining attention while listening,” and is classified under planning (p. 392). The two definitions appear inconsistent at first, yet when further examined, we find that both represent, as Vandergrift et al. (2006) explain, “the important roles played by attention and concentration in the process of listening comprehension” (p.451). O'Bryan and Hegelheimer (2009) state that similar to the personal knowledge items, “it is difficult to elicit these types of beliefs while using think-aloud protocols” (p. 29). A study conducted by Vogely (1995), in which both a questionnaire and a recall task were used, more than half the participants reported using the strategy of recovering concentration upon losing it, which entails, according to the researcher, that they are active listeners (p.47). The study also indicated that giving up listening when having a problem is not favored by students (Vogely, 1995).

A large number of the target population (N=64) consider listening comprehension in English as a challenge. This correlates to some extent with another strategy under the person knowledge factor, which is not feeling nervous when listening to English. More than half the population (N=48) do in fact report feeling nervous when listening in English. Graham and Macaro (2008) say that “the challenges that listening comprehension in second language (L2) poses for learners have long been highlighted” (p. 747). This, according to them, is mainly due to the complexity and rapidity of the processes involved in listening (p. 748). They also state that “there is evidence that [L2 listening comprehension] induces anxiety in learners, because of the pressure it places on them to process input rapidly” (Graham and Macaro, 2008, p. 748).

Finally, mental translation strategies are the least of the metacognitive listening strategies used among the participants. Vandergrift et al. (2006) note that this factor “represents strategies that listeners must learn to avoid if they are to become skilled listeners” (p. 450). Graham and Macaro (2008) also explain that translation is a type of bottom-up strategy which is “the mark of ineffective listeners” (p. 749). Furthermore, Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010) believe that for them to be successful L2 listeners, students are required to overcome the compulsion to translate word for word, which they may face while listening. Vandergrift (2003) says that less translation is a strategy employed by more skilled listeners (p. 458). Translation, he says, “involves only surface mapping between languages [and] generally fails to activate conceptual processes” (2003, p. 486).

However, more than half of participants (N=45) report translating key words as they listen. This is not to be seen as a “mark of ineffective listeners,” for Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010) believe that any translation of key words seems to be related to inferencing and, is thus, seen as helpful. This relates to the use of inferencing, in which listeners make use of linguistic, context and schema knowledge to guess meanings of unknown words. The use of inferencing,

which is a top-down process, as well as translating key words, which is a bottom-up process, indicates that successful listening entails the use of both processes in an interactive way.

In general, the results of this study are consistent with what has been said in the literature regarding metacognitive listening strategies used by successful L2 listeners. A potential justification for the participants' reported use of strategies that are associated with successful listeners is that they are doing their last listening course and are expected to have achieved a high level of listening comprehension ability. However, this is not proof enough that the vast majority of them are effective listeners, for "whatever strategies listeners use, they need to know how to use them effectively and appropriately to deal with task demands" (Graham et al., 2008, p. 67). Graham (2003) also explains that "it is not the *number* of strategies employed that is crucial, but the *manner* in which they are employed" (p. 65), an aspect that cannot be tapped into through the use of a questionnaire.

### Conclusion

The study gave insight into the metacognitive listening strategies used by effective L2 listeners, with ample evidence provided from the literature available on the subject. Results of this study also demonstrate that many L2 learners do in fact perceive listening as difficult, thus investing classroom time in developing learners' strategies is worthwhile. Guiding students through the process of listening, Vandergrift et al. (2006) argue, "can help learners develop the metacognitive knowledge critical to the development of self-regulated listening" (p.437). Such guidance also motivates students and grants them control over their learning (Vandergrift, 2003, p. 489). Also, the fact that listening in a foreign language induces anxiety among learners should be taken into account by teachers, particularly when setting listening tests; they should try their best to reduce as much pressure as possible.

To conclude, Berne (2004) states that "listening comprehension strategies have been and continue to be a very fruitful area for researchers to explore" (p.52). However, "whilst there is a considerable body of literature exploring listening strategy use, the literature related to strategy instruction is more sparse, although there is an emerging research agenda" (Macaro et al., 2007, p. 165). Further, even though listening is now generally believed to play a vital role in second language acquisition and the facilitation of language learning, it is still considered "a young field that merits greater research attention" (Vandergrift, 2003, p. 464).

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## Appendix 1

Distribution of the target population according to the use of metacognitive listening strategies, N=82

Items	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Mean	Standard Deviation	Order
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%			
1. Before I start to listen, I have a plan in my head for how I am going to listen	18	22.0	41	50.0	19	23.2	4	4.9	<b>2.89</b>	0.80	<b>13</b>
2. I focus harder on the text when I have trouble understanding.	45	54.9	36	43.9	1	1.2	0	0.0	<b>3.54</b>	0.53	<b>1</b>
3. I find that listening in English is more difficult than reading, speaking, or writing in English.	17	20.7	20	24.4	32	39.0	13	15.9	2.50	0.99	<b>17</b>
4. I translate in my head as I listen.	6	7.3	39	47.6	30	36.6	7	8.5	2.54	0.76	<b>16</b>
5. I use the words I understand to guess the meaning of the words I don't understand.	40	48.8	39	47.6	3	3.7	0	0.0	<b>3.45</b>	0.57	<b>2</b>
6. When my mind wanders, I recover my concentration right away.	22	26.8	42	51.2	16	19.5	2	2.4	<b>3.02</b>	0.75	<b>12</b>
7. As I listen, I compare what I understand with what I know about the topic.	26	31.7	43	52.4	10	12.2	3	3.7	<b>3.12</b>	0.76	<b>6</b>
8. I feel that listening comprehension in English is a challenge for me.	27	32.9	37	45.1	16	19.5	2	2.4	<b>3.09</b>	0.79	<b>7</b>
9. I use my experience and knowledge to help me understand.	31	37.8	42	51.2	8	9.8	1	1.2	<b>3.26</b>	0.68	<b>5</b>
10. Before listening, I think of similar texts that I may have listened to.	10	12.2	14	17.1	40	48.8	18	22.0	2.20	0.92	19
11. I translate key words as I listen.	12	14.6	33	40.2	31	37.8	6	7.3	2.62	0.83	15
12. I try to get back on track when I lose concentration.	28	34.1	50	61.0	4	4.9	0	0.0	<b>3.29</b>	0.56	<b>4</b>
13. As I listen, I quickly adjust my interpretation if I realize that it is not correct.	20	24.4	49	59.8	12	14.6	1	1.2	<b>3.07</b>	0.66	<b>9</b>
14. After listening, I think back to how I listened, and about what I might do	26	31.7	39	47.6	15	18.3	2	2.4	<b>3.09</b>	0.77	<b>8</b>

differently next time.												
15. I don't feel nervous when I listen to English.	11	13.4	23	28.0	30	36.6	18	22.0	2.33	0.97	18	
16. When I have difficulty understanding what I hear, I give up and stop listening.	2	2.4	17	20.7	29	35.4	34	41.5	1.84	0.84	20	
17. I use the general idea of the text to help me guess the meaning of the words that I don't understand.	34	41.5	43	52.4	5	6.1	0	0.0	<b>3.35</b>	0.60	<b>3</b>	
18. I translate word by word, as I listen.	0	0.0	13	15.9	34	41.5	35	42.7	1.73	0.72	21	
19. When I guess the meaning of a word, I think back to everything else that I have heard, to see if my guess makes sense.	21	25.6	47	57.3	12	14.6	2	2.4	<b>3.06</b>	0.71	<b>10</b>	
20. As I listen, I periodically ask myself if I am satisfied with my level of comprehension.	15	18.3	32	39.0	28	34.1	7	8.5	2.67	0.88	14	
21. I have a goal in mind as I listen.	23	28.0	42	51.2	14	17.1	3	3.7	<b>3.04</b>	0.78	<b>11</b>	
<b>Total Arithmetic Mean</b>	<b>2.84</b>											
<b>Standard. Deviation</b>	<b>0.26</b>											