

Listening Metacognitive Awareness: Case Study on Chinese and Russian Students in French L2

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ABSTRACT

Closely connected with other languages kills, listening plays an essential role in language acquisition thatiswhy perception of authentic speech is one of the most important aspects of language teaching and development of learners' listening strategies is substantial in language teaching. In this paper, we examine French and English literature on this topic. We conduct our study by means of a questionnaire among 21 Chinese and 21 Russian university students who achieved at least Intermediate level in French L2. The data analysis allows us to show how difficult is tening for the students and also to demonstrate which metacognitive listening strategies they use. Finally, wedrawsome trends in L2 listening among interviewed Chinese and Russian students.

Keywords: French second language, L2 listening, metacognitive listening strategies, Russian speakers, Chinese speakers

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning strategies are a very important subject in today's literature and research. In all our everyday teaching practice we find it important to help our students to develop good strategies to acquire better foreign language skills. Traditionally, Chinese and Russian students have been learning second languages using a lot of written skills as writing and reading, oral skills are less developed in a classroom, especially listening. Autonomous learning seems to us to be a solution. We want to see which listening strategies have been already used by some Chinese and Russian students.

According to C.C.M. Goh and V.Aryadoust, "compared with the other L2 skills [...] the field of listening is the youngest in terms of research" (Goh&Aryadoust, 2016: 6). As Vandergrift&Goh (2012) note, "[...] listening has had a place in the language classroom for about 50 years" (Vandergrift&Goh, 2012: 6). It is also interesting to note that listening is the only skill of L1 untaught at school (Carette, 2001: 128). Still it is the first language skill we use from the beginning. Many researchers have emphasized the importance of listening (Vandergrift, 1998, Vandergrift et al, 2006, Goh & Aryadoust, 2016, Rost (2011), Oxford, 2006).

Rubin (1994) analysed over 130 studies where 115 related directly to the listening comprehension and also noticed that we need more research on listening strategies in order to be able to identify appropriate language learning for each kind of student (Rubin, 1994: 216). Berne (2004) sees listening comprehension strategies as "a vital and fertile field for researchers to explore" (Berne, 2004: 529).

As Berne noted in her article in 2004, listening strategies are quite well explored in English L2 listening, but there is some work to do about other languages (Berne, 2004: 529). In this paper, we concentrate ourselves on French as a foreign language and explore strategies used by 21 Chinese students from NangangCollege ofSun Yat-Sen University in China and 21 Russian students from Ural State and Ural State Pedagogical University in Russia. We want to see if there are any differences or common traits in French L2 learning between these two groups of students.

2. BACKGROUND

Definition of I2 listening

Many French textbooks and French as a foreign language methodology are based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) conceived by the Council of Europe. While it is not yet frequently used in China and Russia, it has been developing wildly among French teachers. Even though the Framework gives detailed description of language levels and particular listening skills for these levels, it does not provide any precise definition of what oral comprehension means exactly. Still it indicates us the procedure of listening activity: "In aural reception (listening) activities the language user as listener receives and processes a spoken input produced by one or more speakers." (Council of Europe, 2001: 65).

Rost (2011) defines listening through four types of input processing: neurological, linguistic, semantic and pragmatic processing and notes that "a complete understanding of listening needs to account for all four types [...]" (Rost, 2011: 9). Veltcheff Wilton (2003) add that we listen in order to understand global, specific, detailed or implicit information (Veltcheff Wilton, 2003: 80). So the process of listening appears to be very complex.

To show this complexity of the construct of listening, Gremmo&Holec (1990)present two models of auditory processing: bottom-up ("modèlesémasiologique"), where the comprehension of the message goes from the form to the meaning, and its opposite, the bottom-down model ("modèleonomasiologique"). According to Gremmo&Holec, the bottom-up model has

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four stages: sound discrimination, segmentation, interpretation and finally synthesizing of received information. On the contrary, in the bottom-down process, the listener uses his or her knowledgealready acquired and foresees the meaning of the message, establishing hypotheses and then confirming or disapproving them (Gremmo&Holec, 1990 : 2-3).

Analysing the listening process described by Gremmo&Holec (1990), Berdal-Masuy&Briet (2010) conclude that oral comprehension is not just a simple linear process and takes also the context into account, together with a preparatory stage of constructing a listening plan ("projetd'écoute") by a listener (Berdal-Masuy&Briet, 2010: 20). Carette (2001) develops this idea and reconsiders the Gremmo&Holec's article into a chart representing different listening situations. (Carette, 2001: 128). Finally, Gremmo and Holec (1990) see listening not only as process but also as behaviour. So, to put all these notes together, we have chosen the most appropriate definition of listening found in O'Bryan &Hegelheimer (2009): "Listening is an active and complex process in which listeners must identify sounds and lexical items and make meaning of them through their grammatical structures, verbal and non-verbal cues and cultural context" (O'Bryan &Hegelheimer, 2009: 11)

Definition of strategy

Analysing previous research Vandergrift et al. (2006) note that "awareness of strategies and other variables in learning can have positive influences on language learners' listening development" (Vandergrift et al., 2006: 432). While research on strategies in language learning has been developing for some last decades (Rubin, 1994; Chamot, 2004), we must note that we do not always find the definition of strategy. Rubin (1975) gave a short definition of strategies: "[...] the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge" (Rubin, 1975: 43). In French literature, Bertin (2001) describes learning strategies ("strategies d'apprentissage") as techniques which allow the learner to conceptualize, structure and memorize the linguistic material with which he or she is confronted (Bertin, 2001: 178). This definition goes along with another given by Zimmerman et al. (2000) or another one suggested by the CEFRL: "A strategy is any organised, purposeful and regulated line of action chosen by an individual to carry out a task which he or she sets for himself or herself or with which he or she is confronted" (Council of Europe, 2001: 10). Finally, the most appropriate definition of strategies, on our opinion, was given by Oxford (1990): "[...] specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" (Oxford, 1990: 8).

Listening strategies in I2 classification: metacognition

As we saw, numerous researchers have examined the strategies used in L2 listening and we can find different types of classification of learning strategies. In this paper, we are pausing to reflect on two taxonomies which can be found as references in numerous publications, as (Cyr 1998; O'Bryan &Hegelheimer 2009; Nguyen 2013). These two classifications are proposed by (O'Malley &Chamot 1990 and Oxford 1990).

Oxford (1990) suggests six types of strategies and divides them into two groups: direct (memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies) and indirect strategies (metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies) (Oxford, 1990: 18-21). Even though this classification is well developed and preferred by many researchers, for our research we are talking about in this paper, we preferred using the O'Malley &Chamot's classification where all strategies are only divided into three groups: cognitive, metacognitive and socioaffective strategies(O'Mallet&Chamot, 1990: 137-139). We found this model more appropriate for the questionnaire we used to find the strategies used by some Chinese and Russian learners of L2 French. Others language researchers also used this classification, to mention for example, (Vandergrift 1997, 2003;Goh 2000;Vandergrift et al. 2006; O'Bryan &Hegelheimer2009).

In three groups by O'Malley &Chamot (1990), we find the following strategies:

Cognitive strategies (when learners manipulate mentally or physically their language learning): repetition, resourcing, grouping, note taking, deduction/induction, substitution, elaboration, summarization, translation, transfer and inferencing);

Metacognitive strategies (when learners reflect and evaluate their learning): planning, directed or selected attention, self-management, self-monitoring, problem identification and self-evaluation);

Socioaffective strategies (when learners interact with others participants of learning): questioning for clarification, cooperation, self-talk and self-reinforcement. (O'Malley &Chamot, 1990: 137-139).

Using metacognitive strategies in I2 learning and teaching

Using cognitive learning strategies together with affective strategies is an effective way to help students to show better results in listening and other skills (Chamot, 2004: 17). But it is even more effective to help our students to develop metacognitive strategies, that the student could "understand [...] his or her own thinking and learning processes" (Chamot, 2004: 17) and "select the most appropriate strategies for a given task" (Chamot, 2004: 18).

To the opposite side, we find Field (1998) who disagrees with the idea to teach strategies to learners and says that "it has not been conclusively demonstrated that this kind of strategy training works" (Field, 1998: 115). However, later he recognized the efficacy of metacognitive strategies used in classroom listening tasks (Field, 2008: 103).

Metacognitive strategies were largely explored by Vandergrift et al. (2006). The authors designed a Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ) for French L2 learners. It included 21 statements which can be dispatched into five groups of listening strategies: problem solving, planning and evaluation, translation, person knowledge, attention. For example, the statement №15 ("I don't feel nervous when I listen to French") pointed that a learner assumes one of his or her behaviour trait relative to listening to an oral text in French. The MALQ statements represent instructions learners



can hear from their teachers before the listening activity task: think about the context, try to guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases, use the key words etc. These instructions, which occur mostly helpful depending on the task, are just paraphrased in the MALQ statements.

Vandergrift et al. (2006) used closed-ended multiple choice questions called Likert scales (Likert, 1932) with four, five and six options. Learners should chose weather they agreed or not with a statement, encircling a number from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The authors concluded that the five-option scale was optimal for their study. 966 learners, from different countries, participated in the MALQ questionnaire survey in total, which represents significant results for language science and cognition. That is the reason why we also based our study on this type of questionnaire.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this paper we will analyse two research questions:

Q1: Which metacognitive strategies are used by Chinese and Russian students?

Q2: Is there any difference between Russian and Chinese students in using listening strategies?

4. PROCEDURES

For our research we designed an online questionnaire in French, called "Stratégies de CompréhensionoraleenFrançais langue étrangère" (Listening strategies in L2 French). We placed it on an open source online survey tool LimeSurvey. The questionnaire explores the use of different metacognitive, cognitive and socioaffective strategies and is composed of five main parts: student's presentation and some personal information, cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, socioaffective strategies, preferences. All the parts, as well as introduction, were written in French, with translation in Chinese and Russian of some concepts we judged difficult for intermediate-level students. Students were free to leave a comment for each question if they had some extra information or remarks to note.

We opted for an online questionnaire for some important reasons. First, because it allows a more rapid data processing once the necessary information is collected. Secondly, because students could complete the questionnaire not only at the university, but also in any quiet place, at the moment when they feel more comfortable to make a reflection on their listening habits. We also think that an online questionnaire, if well-designed, is a more pleasant way to participate in a survey for students, as we were concerned about the abandon during the study.

To design our questionnaire that it could be pleasant to complete for students and reliable for our study, we mostly followed instructions given by Berthier (1998). The questions were neutral, in order not to influence the participants' opinion, as "the aim of a questionnaire is not to make people say something, but to get some sincere answers" (translation from Berthier, 1998: 84). We gave priority to closed-ended multiple choice and mixed questions, with an option "other" or "comment" and rating scale questionsof type Likert scales (Likert, 1932; Brown, 1988, 2001). In total, the questionnaire for this study contains 34 questions concerning different aspects of work on listening tasks by Chinese and Russian learners. The ideas for these questions were drawn from such literature sources as (Barbot&Camatarri 1999;Carette 2001;Wolfs 2001; Vandergrift et al. 2006; Wagner 2007). Thus, 18 questions were translated or rephrased into French from MALQ Questionnaire (Vandergrift et al., 2006), two questions were inspired by questions raised in Carette (2001) et 14 others were based on literature analysis listed above. The main idea of the questionnaire was to give cause to students' reflection on their listening process.

In this paper, we have decided to concentrate our study on metacognitive strategies only. So we are interested in three parts of Listening Strategies in L2 French Questionnaire: personal information, metacognitive strategies and preferences.

In the first section of the questionnaire students were asked to give some information about them like age, degree, field of study, other languages. The metacognitive strategies section mostly consisted of multiple-choice questions in form of statements beginning with "Je... / I...". Four options of answerswereproposed: Je suis tout à fait d'accord (I stronglyagree) / Je suis plutôt d'accord (I somewhatagree) / Je ne suis plutôt pas d'accord (I somewhatdesagree) / Je ne suis pas du tout d'accord (I stronglydesagree). As Vandergrift et al. (2006), we also chose to follow the Likert scale (Likert, 1932) and not to give any option as "Neither agree nor disagree" or "I do not know" so that students could not chose neutral position. We did not choose six options of answers, as Vandergrift et al. (2006), because it could confuse students and it would bring us unnecessary specifications for our issue. Only last question had two choice answers. Asked questions covered five metacognitive strategies: planning, directed attention, self-management, self-monitoring, self-evaluation.

Items decryption (Metacognitivestrategies, S)						
Strategy	Item	French statement	Translation			
Planning	S1	[Avant l'écoute, je pense aux textes similaires que j'ai déjà entendus]	« Before listening, I think of similar texts that I may have listened to » (MALQ)			
	S2	[Avant de commencer à écouter, j'ai déjà	"Before I start to listen, I have a plan in my			

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		une idée comment je vais écouter le texte pour le comprendre]	head for how I am going to listen" (MALQ)
	S3	[J'ai un but dans ma tête, quand j'écoute]	"I have a goal in my mind as I listen" (MALQ)
Directed attention	S4	[Quand je ne comprends pas le texte tout de suite, je me focalise encore plus pendant la deuxième écoute]	If I do not understand the text at once, I focus harder during the second time
Self- management	S5	[Quand j'écoute, je compare ce que je comprends avec ce que je connais sur le sujet]	« As I listen, I compare what I understand with what I know about the topic » (MALQ)
	S6	[Je travaille la CO en français en dehors de l'université]	I work on my listening in French outside the university classes
	S7	[J'écoute des chansons en français pour améliorer mon niveau de la CO]	I listen to French songs to improve my level of listening
	S8	[Internet me donne plus de possibilité d'entrainement en CO que les cours à l'université]	Internet gives me more possibilities to practice my listening than university classes
	S9	[Je cherche moi-même des sites avec des exercices de la CO en français]	I look myself for sites with listening exercises in French
	S10	[Je regarde la télévision ou j'écoute de la radio en français pour améliorer ma CO]	I watch TV or listen to radio in French to improve my listening
Self-monitoring	S11	[Après l'écoute je repense ma manière d'écouter et comment je pourrais faire pour mieux comprendre la prochaine fois]	« After listening, I think back to how I listened and about what I might do differently next time" (MALQ)
	S12	[Je fais seulement des activités qui donnent la possibilité de voir ensuite les réponses]	I only do activities which give access to answers afterwards
Self-evaluation	S13	[Pendant l'écoute, je me demande si je suis satisfait(e) de mon niveau de compréhension]	« As I listen, I periodically ask myself if I am satisfied with my level of comprehension" (MALQ)
	S14	[Puis-je m'autoévaluer? (Je n'ai pas besoin de l'évaluation de l'enseignant, je peux facilement dire moi-même si j'ai compris le texte oral / Je ne peux pas dire moi-même si j'ai bien compris le texte oral, seulement mon enseignant peut le dire]	Am I able to evaluate myself? (I do not need my teacher's evaluation, I can easily say if I understood well the oral text / I cannot say myself if I understood well the oral text, only my teacher can say it)

Fig1: Items decryption (Metacognitive strategies, S)



Last section was called "Preferences" by commodity and allowed us to clear up some points for which we could not use the Likert scale but which were interesting for our study:

Items decryption (Preferences, P)					
Item	French statement	Translation			
P1	[Qu'est-ce qui vous stresserait le plus ? Pourquoi ? (Ne pas comprendre tout le discours d'un€ ami€ qui raconte ses dernières vacances au téléphone / Ne pas comprendre une chanson en langue étrangère)	What would stress you the most? Why? (Not to understand the whole speech of a friend who tells about his/her last holydays on the phone / Not to understand a song in a foreign language)			
P2	[Quelle est la compétence la plus facile à apprendre pour vous? Classez les quatre compétences : CE/CO/EE/EO]	Which skill is the easiest to learn for you? Order the four skills from the easiest to the most difficult: reading/listening/writing/speaking.			
P3	[En quelle langue préférez-vous avoir les consignes pour les exercices en CO ? (en chinois/russe / en français)]	Do you prefer to read the instructions to an exercise in Chinese/Russian / in French?			
P4	[Quels sites Internet utilisez-vous pour améliorer la CO en dehors de la classe ?]	Which Internet sites do you use to improve you listening outside the classroom?			
P5	[Les enseignants vous proposent-ils des sites à utiliser pour améliorer votre CO en français ?]	Do your teachers suggest you any sites to use to improve your listening in French?			

Fig 2: Items decryption (Preferences, P)

Participants

In total, 42 students participated in our survey: 21 Chinese students from Nanfang College of Sun Yat-Sen University in China, with Mandarin as L1, and 21 Russian students from Ural State and Ural State Pedagogical University in Russia, with Russian as their first language. All of them are in Bachelor degree and all 42 students are 18-26 years old. They all have at least Intermediate level of French L2. Six of them are advanced students. Russian students completed the online questionnaire in 2015 and Chinese students participated in the survey in 2016 and completed the same questionnaire, but with translation of some difficult concepts in Chinese this time.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

To treat research questions, we used our list of metacognitive strategies and the students' answers. The questions were not asked in the same order as we present them in Figure 1. For our analysis, we converged them into the five types of metacognitive strategies we are exploring. As the options for students'answers represented a degree of agreement or disagreement ('strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'), we attributed the specific points from 1 to 4 to each option, according to the Likert analysis. For example, the S1 statement of strategy ('Before listening, I think of similar texts that I may have listened to') was judged positive for a better oral comprehension, so the answer 'I strongly agree' was ranked at 4 points, and gradually it went until 1 point for the option 'I strongly disagree' for the S1. We asked the last question S14 ('Am I able to evaluate myself?') differently and proposed only a two-answer option to make it easier for our participants to understand the concept of self-evaluation and we did not have to use a sophisticated definition. Consequently, we ranked the first option ('I do not need my teacher's evaluation, I can easily say if I understood well the oral text') at 4 points and the option 'I cannot say myself if I understood well the oral text, only my teacher can say it' at 1 point, which allowed us to use these numbers as a nominal variable for all 14 questions.

Results

Research question 1. Which metacognitive strategies are used by Chinese and Russian students?

The distribution of answers for each strategy statement can be seen below:



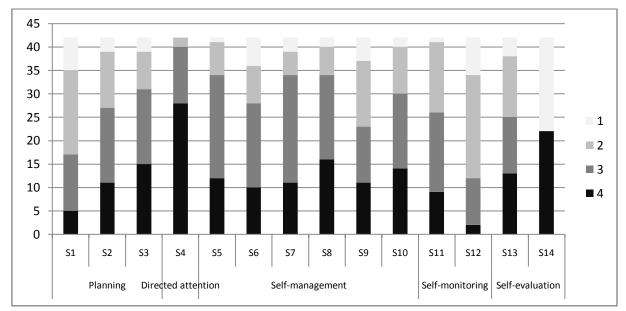


Figure 3: Total number of answers ranked from 1 to 4 points by 42 students for each strategy statement

From the Figure 3, we can see that the most used strategy among our 42 participants is S4 (directed attention), none of students did completely disagree with the statement. We can see from the $\chi 2$ test that statistically the most significant results are S4, S5, S7, S8 and S12 (p<0,001) and if we analyse the degree of agreement for these statements, we can see that the directed attention strategy S4 and the self-management strategy (S5, S7 and S8) are the most used. The self-monitoring S12 strategy was reported the least used by participants. The planning strategy S1 was also found among the least used ($\chi 2$ =9,6190, p=0,05). The self-evaluation S14 strategy was dispatched and the self-management S9 were dispatched quite proportionally (p=0,8).

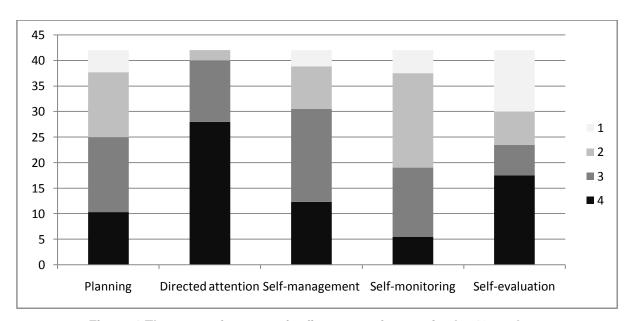


Figure 4:The mean of answers for five types of strategies by 42 students

If we compare the mean of each strategy, we can notice that the most used strategy are directed attention and self-management. In contrast, the least used is self-monitoring. Finally, if we look at the total strategy use mean number of participants (N=42),65% of students reported using the analysed metacognitive strategies (p=0,2).

Research question 2: Is there any difference between Russian and Chinese students in using listening strategies?

We found some differences between Russian and Chinese participants of our study. To begin with, slightly more Russian students reported to use metacognitive strategies in total: 69% against 62% Chinese students (p=0,02).



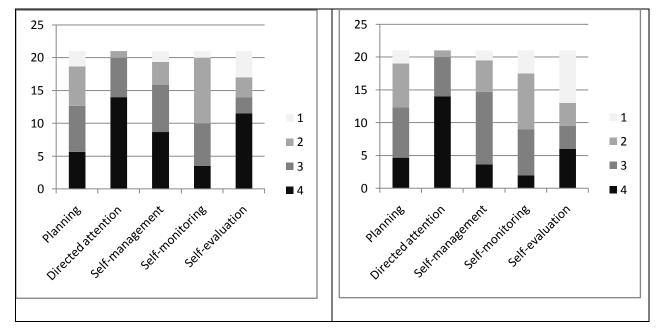
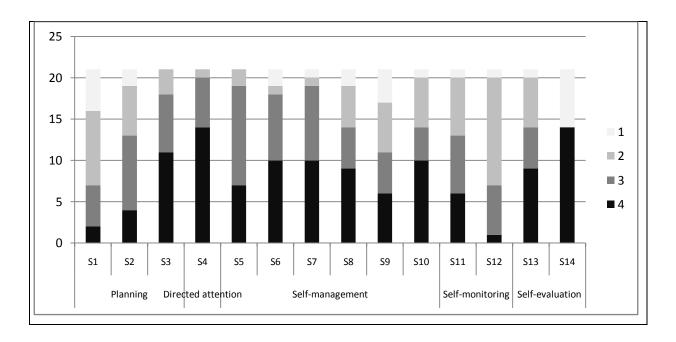


Figure 5: The mean of answers for five types of strategies by Russian (left) and Chinese students (right)

From the table above, it can be seen that while Russian and Chinese students, who participated in our survey, use equally the first four strategies, there is a difference in using the last self-evaluation strategy, the mean percentage being 67% in case of Russian students' answers against 45% by Chinese students.

If we look separately at each strategy use in the figure below, we can see an interesting tendency with exactly the same allotment of answers for the strategy S4, and still it is the most used strategy according to these two charts. The S12 is still the least used among all participants.

Essentially, Russian participants seem to use more some types of strategies like S3, S6, S7, S13 and S14, but Chinese students slightly stepped them over for the S2 and S8. As for the strategies S6 (self-management) and S14 (self-evaluation), the difference is statistically significant.





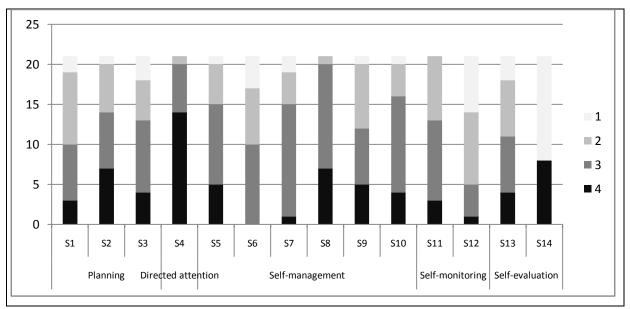


Figure 6: Total number of answers ranked from 1 to 4 points by Russian students (above) and Chinese students (below) for each strategy statement

Talking about differences and similarities between our participants, some important information about degree of difficulty that is linked with oral comprehension for students should be underlined. In the 'preferences' part, students chose listening as one of the most difficult skills for them.

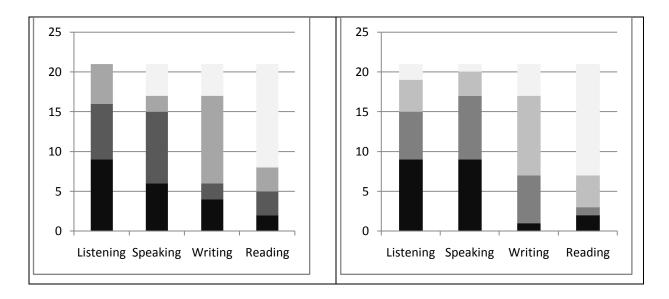


Figure 7: Degree of difficulty of four language skills, from the easiest (in white) to the most difficult (in black), for Russians participants (left) and Chinese participants (right)

The Figure 7 illustrates to what extent oral skills are considered difficult by our Russian and Chinese participants. As we can see, speaking slightly overpasses listening for our Chinese students, but still listening stays at the second position for difficulty, whereas for Russian students it is clearly the most difficult skill. Let us remind that participants had to classify the fours language skills, so that the answer would not be influenced by the more direct question as 'Is listening difficult for you? The Figure 7 also shows us that the written skills are reported to be easier for the totality of Russian and Chinese students.

Two thirds of Russian students reported to prefer having instructions for a listening activity in French. In contrast, only 5 Chinese interviewed students chose French for the P3 question, whereas 16 persons said they prefer to listen and read instructions in their native language.

Finally, only six students from all 42 participants (14%) said not to use any Internet sites to practice autonomously their listening, which means that about 86% of interviewed students practice their listening outside the classroom. Among the



sites our participants use, we found france4.fr, tv5monde.com with their linguistic project "7 jours sur la planète", French radio (radiofrance.fr, franceinfo.fr), frdic.com, hujiang.com, YouTube, francaisfacil.com, busuu.com. 61% (N=26) of our participants reported to receive some recommendations for the listening training from their teachers.

Discussion

Our study concludes that directed attention and self-management are the two metacognitive listening strategies the most used by our participants. At the same time, we found more Russian students who use the self-evaluation strategy than Chinese students. Russian participants reported using slightly more metacognitive strategies, but we cannot conclude that this difference is significant.

Our study also highlights that listening is considered by our participants as a difficult skill. Would not it be an indicator that listening is still the least developed field for students who work on this skill only occasionally in the classroom and are not cheered on enough by their teachers to self-practice listening autonomously? Another question should be raised: how can teachers motivate their students to work more on listening all along with a very important number of hours they need to devote to written skills?

The 'Preferences' part of the questionnaire shows some interesting results. The P1 question was issued from Carette (2001) where the author talked about representations on teaching and learning of listening and about methods and representations which could harm the language learning. So we wanted to see this point with our participants. Interestingly, both Chinese and Russians students reported paying more attention to a friend's speech than to a song in a foreign language. From the students' explanation we can conclude that the fact to be able to listen to an oral text more than one time lowers the pressure on students and this can be an advantage for the autonomous listening training in L2. However, students do not see the possibility to ask to repeat or reformulate a part of an oral text during a real interaction as beneficial. Still the affective context cannot be neglected in such interaction.

We are also conscious about limitations of our study. Considering a very limited number of participants, we cannot draw clear conclusions about the differences between Chinese and Russian students, but still we hope that the findings of this study will bring some clarifications about the metacognitive listening strategy use by language learners.

Conscious also about the possible native language differences between Chinese and Russian, we did not invite any beginner-level students to participate in our survey. We did not examine the question of some possible differences between the language levels, whether beginners in French or advance-level students would use more of metacognitive strategies or a certain kind of them, and it could be next extension of this study just as a study on age differences.

6. CONCLUSION

Listening plays an important role in language learning and oral communication. As we can see, this skill should gain more time in the classroom as well as in autonomous learning as oral comprehension is still considered one of the most difficul skills to achieve. In our opinion, learners should use more metacognitive strategies to progress in language learning. We believe that this research paper could bring some clarification and some ideas for L2 listening development to foreign language teachers or any language learners themselves.

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