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## On the Application of Metacognitive Strategies in High School English Listening Teaching

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### ABSTRACT

In the process of English teaching in high school, teachers need to fully understand students' learning styles and the foundation of their English proficiency level, and help them to develop a set of scientific and practical learning strategies for students in order to improve their learning quality effectively. With the deepening of English teaching reforming high schools, training the students' learning ability has become the focus of the teachers. Metacognitive strategies, widely used in high school English teaching, have received more and more attention from high school English educators. In this paper, the application of metacognitive strategies in high school English listening teaching will be discussed.

**Keywords:** *Metacognitive strategies, English listening teaching, application*

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### INTRODUCTION

Listening comprehension is not a passive action in language learning, but a complex and active cognitive procession. Studies show that listening, speaking, reading, and writing account for 45%, 16%, 30%, and 9% of the language using activities in people's daily lives, showing that listening is the most important communicative activity in people's daily life[1]. In traditional high school English listening teaching, teachers and teaching materials have always occupied the dominant position of teaching, and students only passively receive and understand. This kind of time-consuming and inefficient teaching pattern greatly limits the improvement of students' listening. The use of metacognitive strategies will guide the students to play an active roles in class, and students can maximize their listening ability by regulating their own learning behaviors and carefully planning, monitoring their learning process and assessing their learning outcome.

### Overview of metacognitive strategies

Metacognitive strategies are management strategies that are adopted to successfully learn a foreign language, including developing learning plans, monitoring the learning process and evaluating learning outcomes[2]. This involves planning the learning process, thinking about how to make learning more effective, self-monitoring during the learning process, and self-evaluating the effectiveness of learning after a language activity. Meta-cognitive strategies are important for improving students' listening comprehension because they help students to effectively self-regulate in their listening learning.

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Meta-cognitive listening comprehension strategies are generally divided into three categories: planning strategies, monitoring strategies, and assessment strategies.

Planning strategies involve planning and organizing the goals, processes, and steps of the activity before the learner listens, such as defining listening goals, anticipating key points and difficulties, predicting possible problems, analyzing how to complete the task, allocating attention, and scheduling listening time. Monitoring strategy refers to the learner's conscious monitoring of the learning process, learning methods, and their implementation and effectiveness during the listening training process based on the learning objectives and learning plan, such as monitoring whether he/she understands the material, whether his/her attention is focused, whether the listening strategies used are appropriate, and whether he/she is following the listening training plan. Assessment strategies involve evaluating the learner's progress and adjusting the strategies developed at the planning stage and used during the learning process according to the actual situation, including assessing the difficulty of the listening material, assessing whether the learner has achieved the planned listening goals, assessing whether the learner has made progress in listening, analyzing the reasons for not understanding the material, and adjusting and improving the listening strategies used in a timely manner. The following are some examples of the listening strategies commonly used.

Underwood divided listening comprehension into three stages : pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening. He argues that the implementation of learning strategies is a series of processes of mental processing and integration and information reconstruction according to a certain pattern.

In 2007, Vandergrift put forward a listening teaching model with 5 stages, and listed the metacognitive activities that each stage involves. His model could not only train the students both bottom-up and top-down listening skills, but also cultivate their metacognitive awareness which might be more important role for listening comprehension.

#### **Stage one: Planning and prediction**

The teacher tells the students the topic and the genre of the coming listening and ask them to predict the main idea and the key words. At this stage, the teacher is teaching the students metacognitive strategies: planning and attention-focusing.

#### **Stage two: initial verification**

The students listen to the article for the first time and verify their initial assumptions, trying to correct the wrong ones and label the place where they need more information. The students are learning to monitor their listening process.

The students may compare the notes with their partners' and make modifications. At the same time, they confirm their problems and the details that they still needs to pay attention. At this stage, the students are involved in the metacognitive activities : monitoring, planning and selective attention.

#### **Stage three: The second verification**

The teacher guides the students' attention to the supporting details of the main idea with their classmates by paying selective attention by taking notes and making corrections. The metacognitive strategies used by the students are monitoring and problem -solving .

In the following class discussion, the students recall the main points and important details of the paragraph together, as well as the listening process and method on how they understand certain words or paragraphs of the listening passage. The students are learning and monitoring their listening.

#### **Stage four: The last verification**

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After discussion, the teacher will ask the students to listen to the recording once again and pay special attention the previously missed parts once again. Later, they are allowed to compare the recordings with the transcripts partially or entirely. The metacognitive strategies used by the students are selective attention and monitoring.

#### **Stage five: Reflection**

The teacher can ask the students to write down the objectives of the next listening according to the previous listening strategy discussion. At this stage, the students should discuss the characteristics of the recording and transcripts. Vandergrift called this teaching procedure a pedagogical circle.

#### **The present situation of English listening teaching in senior high schools**

Teaching listening is a crucial teaching module in English language teaching. Only when students understand English can they properly use the language in communication in English. However, at present, English teachers in China's high schools do not pay much enough attention to listening teaching. Due to the influence of traditional exam-oriented education, to ensure their students to get higher scores in the different kinds of examinations, high school English teachers pay more attention to teaching English linguistic knowledge. The most prominent ones are the teaching of vocabulary and grammar[3]. For listening teaching, teachers usually just play the recording or the video of the listening materials to students and give them some time to answer the previously designed questions, and then announce the correct answers to students later, and send the recording and scripts to students to them for repeated listening and correcting the wrong answers by themselves. At the same time, the interaction between teachers and students is kept at a very low level. Most of the learners respect the teachers but stay away from them. Even if they encounter problems in listening learning, they are afraid to ask questions. So in the long run, students' listening ability cannot be improved or even declines.

#### **The application of metacognitive strategies in English listening teaching of Chinese senior high schools**

The application of metacognitive strategies in high school English listening instruction can effectively monitor and manage English teachers' teaching plans and behaviors, as well as guide English teachers' teaching behaviors. Based on the requirements of the metacognitive strategies, high school English listening teaching should be divided into three stages: pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening.

#### **The use of metacognitive strategies during pre-listening stage**

When teaching listening to students, high school English teachers first need to make detailed teaching procedures for listening instruction, which is the basic guarantee for improving the quality of listening instruction. The application of metacognitive strategies in pre-listening instruction means that teachers need to guide students to construct learning goals and predict learning contents before playing the recording or the video.

First, teachers need to guide students to develop learning goals and learning plans. Developing a learning plan is one of the metacognitive strategies. By developing a learning plan, students can fully understand what they need to do in the learning process and what learning outcome they may obtain. In the case of teaching English listening in high school, students should be aware what they need to do in the listening process and what kind of listening purpose they need to keep in minds[4]. Teachers need to guide students to make a set of scientific and practical learning plan according to their English proficiency level and learning ability, and strictly monitor students' implementation of the learning plan to ensure its effectiveness and feasibility, and explain the relevant information of the listening content to the students,

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mainly the background knowledge and topics of the listening materials. Only when students have a good understanding of the background and topics of the listening materials can they understand them more easily in the process of listening. At the same time, through the explanation of the background and theme of the listening materials, students can learn the necessary linguistic knowledge that is not included in their textbook, such as some sentence patterns and cultural knowledge. Finally, teachers need to remind the students to be attentive while listening. Correctly focused attention can help them to grasp the key information clearly and understand the logical structure of the listening passage. It is vital to cultivate the habit of focusing their attention in listening instruction, which is a decisive factor to improve students' English listening skills.

### **The use of metacognitive strategies during while listening stage**

The application of metacognitive strategies in listening instruction is essentially to instruct students to monitor their own learning behaviors and adjust their learning strategies, including comprehension of listening materials and concentration.

First, the students should know the key content of the listening material. Determining the key content of the listening material is one of the most important methods to improve listening accuracy. They can be guided to know the key content of the listening materials based on the key words and phrases and the pre-designed listening questions for the listening materials. After a listening passage is played, teachers need to instruct students to grasp the key content of the listening material as well as understand the general meaning of the listening material, and instruct students to pay attention to the important details to help them understand the listening material effectively and improve their listening skills. Secondly, students need to master the linking words between sentences because linking words or phrases usually indicate the logical relation of the information. Only by fully understanding and listening to the conjunctions between the listening material, can the students understand the logical clues in the content of the listening material[5]. The connecting words usually include transitions, cause and effect words, and stress words, etc. After listening to the transitional words or phrases, students can fully grasp the tone and storyline changes of the main character in the listening materials, so that they can understand the logic of the listening materials. Finally, students' listening behavior can be monitored by their understanding of these words. When students listen to the listening materials, teachers need to monitor students' listening behavior to see if they are distracted, or not in the mental state of listening. In response to these situations, teachers need to promptly remind students to adjust their learning strategies and keep concentrated on the learning task.

### **The application of metacognitive strategies in the post listening stage**

In the process of teaching English listening in high school, teachers need to guide students to reflect on their learning plans and learning behaviors after listening to the designated task. Specifically, teachers should guide students to listen to the listening materials repeatedly and review their learning plans, learning ideas and learning difficulties in the process of repeated listening, so as to find out where their problems lie and make adjustments in the future listening. In short, guiding students to reflect on their learning can cultivate good independent learning ability, as well as good metacognitive awareness, and continuously improve the quality of students' learning.

In conclusion, high school English teachers need to pay more attention to metacognitive strategies and raise the students' awareness and train them to use these strategies to develop effective learning plans, conduct thorough learning monitoring and comprehensive learning reflection, improve the quality of learning, and promote the improvement of students' overall literacy.

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## A case study of teaching metacognitive listening strategies

### *The theatres that time never forgot*

*Since ancient times, people have enjoyed themselves at the theatre. Here we will visit two historical theatres, one in the East and one in the West. And listen to the stories each has to tell.*

*The Deheyuan Grand Theatre(德和园大戏楼 in Chinese) located in the Summer Palace in Beijing was built in the Qing Dynasty for the Royal Family. It is regarded as the place where Peking Opera developed into its current form. Great masters of Peking Opera, such as Yang Xiaolou and Tan Xinpei performed on the stage here. The theatre has three floors. From top to bottom, they are the Fu Stage, the Lu Stage and the Shou Stage. In English, they are called the Happiness stage, the Prosperity stage and the Longevity stage. The stages have special doors for actors to jump out of the floor and equipment to help them fly through the air. A well and five ponds under the Shou stage are used in water scenes. They also serve to make sound effects louder. Today visitors to Deheyuan Theatre are still amazed by its structure and beautiful paintings.*

*The first Globe Theatre was created by a group of actors, one of whom was William Shakespeare. It opened in London in 1599 and became a huge success until it burned down in a fire in 1613. The Globe Theatre we see today is by the River Thames, close to the site of the original building. As in Shakespeare's day, the cheapest tickets are the standing tickets under the open sky. The big difference is that the audiences today can watch plays with both male and female actors. Acting in Shakespeare's time was a job for the men only. The theatre has a round shape, and the stage area has three main elements: a blue roof painted with stars, the stage itself and a hidden door in the floor. If you are a fan of William Shakespeare, you must come to the Globe to see a play. As Shakespeare himself said, "All the world is a stage"[6].*

### **Pre- listening stage**

Before listening, the learners need assistance in activating what they already know about the content they are going to hear. Simply being told the topic is not enough. Pre-listening activities will establish what is already known about the subject, build up the necessary background knowledge, and set up a purpose for listening. The most important strategy to cultivate at this stage is prediction.

Task 1 Help the students to brain storm words and logical structure related to the topic " *The theatres that time never forget*", as many as possible.

Aim: to activate students' background knowledge.

Task 2 Ask the students some questions

- According to the title of the passage, what kind of theatres will be talked about in the video? Modern ones or ancient ones?
- According to the usual choice of the content of this textbook and the title of this chapter, please guess theatres in which countries may be discussed?
- When people talk about a theatre, what details will be included?

### **While-listening stage: monitoring**

Task 3. Listen for the first time and find out the names and location of the two theatres

Aim: to listen for the gist

Task 4. Listen for the second time, and answer the following questions: How many stages are there in Deheyuan Grand theatre in Beijing? What are used for water scene? Who built the first Globe Theatre? Were there any female actor during Shakespeare's time?

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Aim: to listen for details

**Task 5.** Listen for the third time to fill in the missing information in the following chart (for more details and the structure)

	Deheyuan Grand Theatre	The Globe Theatre
Location		
Time of construction		
The stage(s)		
Types of opera		
The builder		

**Post-listening stage: evaluation**

**Task 6:** Ask the students to compare their notes or compare their notes with the video scripts

Aim: to evaluate their listening outcome

**Task 7:** Ask the students to think about how they completed the listening task and think about what learning methods they can get from this listening process.

Aim: to raise their awareness for using metacognitive strategies.

**CONCLUSION**

Emphasizing the use of metacognitive strategies in listening teaching allows students to try and experience a set of listening strategies such as planning, monitoring and evaluating. The sense of achievement from using various strategies not only helps the learners to master various listening skills but also assists them to improve their metacognitive awareness, metacognitive level, listening comprehension performance and self-learning awareness. This kind of teaching places higher demands on English teachers and promote them to continuously develop themselves professionally.

English teacher should firstly have a deep understanding of the theories about learning strategies, the meaning of various learning strategies, their theoretical basis, the scope of their application, and their role and significance for foreign language learning. Secondly, they should consciously raise students' awareness of using cognitive strategies[7]. The listening teaching pattern which emphasizes strategy training also puts forward new requirements for teachers' lesson planning. Metacognitive strategies (planning, monitoring and evaluation, etc.) should be one of the elements considered in lesson planning in the selection of listening teaching materials. Teachers should prepare lessons in a targeted manner based on the learning materials and train the students metacognitive listening strategies in the pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening stages of a lesson and integrate them into each specific task. In the learning process, students should be guided to actively give feedback, evaluate and summarize the listening process and learning outcomes in a timely manner[8]. By doing so, teachers can adjust the teaching content and strategies timely according to the actual classroom teaching and learning situation on one hand, and guide students to identify their own learning deficiencies in order to take remedial measures accordingly on the other. This kind of interactive mode of teaching and learning can continuously raise the students' awareness of using metacognitive strategies in listening and improve their ability of using listening strategies flexibly.

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