THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FL LISTENING ANXIETY AND FL LISTENING STRATEGIES: THE CASE OF TURKISH EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract:-It is assumed that learners may feel anxious while listening in the target language due to many factors such as the authenticity of the listening text, incomprehensibility of the listening material and environmental factors. In this respect, developing effective listening strategies may help to overcome many problems related to target language listening. It is then of interest for researchers to investigate whether there is a relationship between FL listening anxiety and FL listening strategies. In the Turkish EFL context, studies concerning this issue are scarce. This study aims at filling the gap in the recent literature on listening anxiety and listening strategies in Turkish EFL context. For this purpose, 60 students at the intermediate English proficiency level participated in the study. Both quantitative and qualitative findings indicated a negative association between FL listening anxiety and strategy use. The results of the study were discussed in the light of the recent literature and it has been put forward that investigation of anxiety and strategy use for listening skill is crucial for improving effective listening in the classroom context.

Key-Words: - Listening in FL, FL Listening Anxiety, FL Listening Strategies,

1 Introduction
It is widely accepted that anxiety plays a crucial role while learning a foreign language (FL). Although anxiety is often associated with fear, frustration and negative arousal, FL/SL learning anxiety is thought to be a unique type of anxiety peculiar to learning a FL/SL. It has been reported that in language classes students who suffer from FL anxiety become defensive and offensive, are frightened by the tests, tend to sit passively in the classroom, are reluctant to do activities that could improve their language skills and are unable to use effective learning strategies[1],[2]. While some students are concerned about this general anxiety towards language learning, some others report their concern for more specific types of language learning anxiety; that is, anxiety specific to language skills such as speaking, reading, writing and listening. Among these, one of the areas in which little research has been carried out is FL listening anxiety and possible solutions to overcome this skill specific language anxiety.

2 Problem Formulation

2.1. Listening in FL and FL Listening Anxiety
Listening is an indispensable part of our daily life. In every instance we are involved in interaction, we need the mastery of listening skill for effective communication. While learning a foreign language, listening becomes more important as our learners need to understand at least what is said to them for successful communication. Rivers [3] pinpoints the necessity of developing listening skill for a FL learner as aural comprehension is the essential element in act of communication. However, it is important to keep in mind that listening is not always in a participatory mood. Learners may also be involved in non-participatory listening in which they do not take part in actual interaction with the interlocutors, but listen in a rather passive mood [4]. No matter how listening is carried out in the language classroom, students need to develop effective
listening skills and strategies to cope with the difficulties of listening in FL.

According to Chastain [5] since listening is a complex skill students have the fear of understanding the message and interpret it correctly. Why many students complain about the difficulties of listening in FL may also depend on feelings of inadequacies or lack of confidence [6]. In this respect, FL listening anxiety may intervene in successful foreign language learning experience and may cause tension of fear while listening in FL. Christenberry [7] underlines the problematic nature of listening and asserts that it is an incredibly difficult area to teach properly; thus, is likely to cause anxiety. Furthermore, Vogely [8] clearly emphasizes that one of the most ignored but potentially one of the most debilitating type of anxiety is the anxiety accompanying listening comprehension.

It has been highlighted that learners may feel anxious while listening in the target language due to many factors such as the authenticity of the listening text, incomprehensibility of the listening material and some external environmental factors like noise and inaudibility[9];[10]. Whatever the reason is, uncertainties listening skill imposes track learners back from a successful listening experience. Although studies on skill specific anxieties such as listening anxiety are still rare, importance of FL anxiety has been realized by some researchers in recent years.

Vogely [11] focused on listening comprehension anxiety and what strategies can be employed to help learners deal with this anxiety more effectively. This study yielded that the nature of speech has an effect on the listener's anxiety level. The use of unfamiliar topics or unfamiliar vocabulary in the listening text was another problem reported by the students. The nature of the listening comprehension practice and insufficiency of listening times were other reported causes for anxiety. Vogely's [11] research also proposed that the use of listening strategies could help relieve student anxiety toward a listening comprehension activity.

In a recent study on FL listening anxiety, Elkhafaifi [12] aimed at finding out whether FL listening anxiety existed as a phenomenon distinguishable from general FL anxiety and whether anxiety affected student achievement and listening comprehension performance in Arabic courses. As a result, it was revealed that FL listening anxiety is a distinguishable phenomenon. Moreover, there is a significant effect for general FL learning anxiety attributable to gender, with females being more anxious than males, and unexpectedly students who took the Arabic as an elective course reported the highest level of listening anxiety. Elkhafaifi’s [12] study has important pedagogical implications, as instructors need to take anxiety into consideration especially in listening comprehension exercises and classroom strategies in order to reduce anxiety while teaching listening.

It is clear that listening in FL proposes some difficulties for learners. Since listening is a more spontaneous skill compared to reading and writing, developing effective FL listening strategies is crucial for overcoming anxiety.

2.2. Strategy Use in FL and FL Listening Strategies

Language learning strategies are defined as consciously selected processes which are assumed to enhance the learning of a second or foreign language, through the storage, retention, recall, and application of information about that language [13]. Although strategies are used generally by successful FL learners, using strategies specific to language skills is important for achieving success in these skills.

As for listening, employment of strategy use is of crucial importance due to the online processing takes place during listening. That is, learners have to decode the message, understand and interpret it in the course of listening. O'Malley, Chamot and Kupper [14] classified listening comprehension strategies based on research findings on the effective strategy use of successful FL/SL listeners. This classification includes meta-cognitive listening comprehension strategies, cognitive listening comprehension strategies, and social-affective listening comprehension strategies.

Meta-cognitive listening strategies include direct attention, selective attention. Other meta-cognitive strategies are self management, self monitoring and self evaluation in which the learner becomes aware of the effectiveness of his listening skills. Cognitive strategies include effective activities such as repetition, translation, note taking, deduction, inferencing, elaboration and detecting key words. Social-affective dimension of listening strategies include individual or group activities
such as cooperation, recasting and clarification of meaning.

It is assumed that employment of effective strategies during listening comprehension in FL may help to overcome the anxiety listening imposes on FL learners. Since anxiety is an obstacle for effective listening and hence speaking, then the ways to overcome such anxiety is important for FL educators and learners.

2.3. Purpose of the Study
It has been observed that many students in the Turkish EFL context experience anxiety while listening in the foreign language and whether they use FL listening strategies and to what extent they employ these needs to be investigated to help learners overcome FL listening anxiety. What is more, there is no published study about such a relationship in Turkish EFL context. Based on this gap in the literature, this study aims to find the answers of the following questions:

1. Is there any relationship between FL listening anxiety and FL listening strategy use of the students in a Turkish EFL context?
2. What do the students in a Turkish EFL context think about their FL listening strategy use and experiences of FL listening anxiety?

2.4. Methodology

2.4.1. Subjects
Subjects of the study are 60 intermediate level students enrolled at the School of Foreign Languages at Anadolu University, Turkey. All the students are monolingual speakers of Turkish and they are learning English as a foreign language.

Students are taking various courses related to FL such as reading, writing, speaking and listening, and grammar. Developing essential listening skills is crucial for these students to pass the course and be able to speak effectively in the target language.

2.4.2 Instruments
In order to find out whether there is any relationship between FL listening anxiety and FL listening strategy use of the participants, Turkish versions of two quantitative instruments are used: Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (FLLAS) and Listening Comprehension Strategy Inventory (LCSI).

2.4.2.1 Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (FLLAS)
FLLAS is originally developed by Elkhafaifi [12]. It is a 5-point Likert type scale (ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) consisted of 20 items. Since the subjects in this study are intermediate level students, Turkish version of FLLAS was administered in order to overcome any possible difficulty and further anxiety that may be caused by the scale. To measure the reliability of the Turkish version of the scale, Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was calculated and it was found as .84. This finding indicates that this instrument has high reliability to be used for the purposes of the study.

2.4.2.2 Listening Comprehension Strategy Inventory (LCSI)
The second instrument administered to the subjects is the listening comprehension strategy inventory (LCSI) developed by Gercek [15]. There are a total of 20 items and all the items were based on the previous studies in FL listening strategies. The scale is a 5-point Likert type. The construct validity of the scale was measured through a factor analysis. Internal reliability of the scale was measured as .72 which indicated a high level of reliability. LCSI is developed to be used with Turkish EFL learners; thus it was quite appropriate to use for the purposes of the study.

2.4.3. Data Collection and Analysis
The FL listening anxiety scale and the FL listening strategies survey were administered together to ease the analytical procedures since a correlation analysis was applied. After the completion of the instruments, Five students were from lower FL anxiety level and five students were from higher FL anxiety level were chosen randomly for interview.

A Semi-structured interview was conducted with open ended questions to investigate whether they feel anxious while listening to FL, how they handle difficulties while listening, whether they are aware of FL listening strategies, and whether and how they employ listening strategies while listening in FL.
As for data analysis, means of subjects’ FLLAS scores and standard deviations were calculated. Based on these descriptive findings, FL listening anxiety levels of the students were determined by using the following procedure:

- Low FL Listening Anxiety: Mean – St. Dev.
- High FL Listening Anxiety: Mean + St. Dev.
- Medium FL Listening Anxiety: Score between M – St. Dev. & M + St. Dev.

Subjects FL listening strategy use scores gathered through LCSLI were analyzed by calculating the mean scores and the standard deviations. Following is the key for Likert scale:

- 1.0-1.4: Never or almost never used
- 1.5-2.4: Generally not used
- 2.5-3.4: Sometimes used
- 3.5-4.4: Generally used
- 4.5-5.0: Always or almost always used

In order to answer whether there is any relationship between FL listening anxiety and FL listening strategy use of the participants, a Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was calculated. The interviews of the students were transcribed and analyzed qualitatively to shed more light on FL listening anxiety and FL listening strategy use.

### 3 Problem Solution

#### 3.1. Research Question 1

In order to answer the first research question, first of all descriptive analyses were computed for each of the scales. Accordingly, students with high, medium and low anxiety levels were determined. Table 1 below shows the distribution of the students according to the anxiety levels.

Table 1. Distribution of the Subjects According to FL Listening Anxiety Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FL Listening Anxiety Levels</th>
<th>N*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Anxiety Level</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Anxiety Level</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Anxiety Level</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N*: Number of the Subjects

As can be seen from the table, number of the students experiencing high levels of anxiety is more than the students with medium and low levels of FL listening anxiety. This finding shows that in the context of the study, intermediate level students feel anxiety (whether at high or medium levels) while listening in FL. Of the 60 students, only 18 of them reported to experience low levels of FL listening anxiety.

The other variable investigated in the study was the employment of FL listening strategy use. Descriptive findings show that mean score of the participants’ overall FL listening strategy use is 3.2. This finding indicates a medium level of strategy use. That is, the subjects in the study do not employ many listening strategies and their use of these strategies is at an average level. Table 2 shows subjects’ distribution of the mean scores of FL listening strategy use according to their levels of FL listening anxiety.

Table 2. Mean Scores of FL Listening Strategy Use According to FL Anxiety Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FL Listening Anxiety Levels</th>
<th>N*</th>
<th>Mean**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Anxiety Level</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Anxiety Level</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Anxiety Level</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N*: Number of the students
Mean**: Mean Scores of FL Listening Strategy Use

To find out whether there is a relationship between FL listening anxiety and FL listening comprehension strategy use of the subjects, a Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient was computed. The scores subjects got from FLLAS and LCSLI were statistically correlated and the correlation coefficient was found -.68. The negative correlation between two variables indicates that when students’ anxiety level increases, their use of listening strategy use decreases and vice versa.

One possible explanation of this finding may be attributed to the past listening experiences of the students in the language classroom. In their previous language courses, listening skill is generally one of the most ignored skills; hence, they may feel negative arousal when they face with various listening texts at the university. Although there is not a published research on the relationship between FL listening anxiety and strategy use, literature on listening anxiety supports the findings of the study. Scarcella and Oxford [16] underline the importance of the employment of effective listening strategies to overcome the possible anxiety students may feel while approaching
listening tasks. Similarly, Vogely [8] emphasizes the role of the listening strategies for better listening experience and highlights the importance of the teacher in the listening classroom as they may help their learners become aware of various effective listening strategy use.

3.2. Research Question 2
The second research question was of a qualitative nature and five high and five low anxious students were randomly chosen to learn what they think about their FL listening strategy use and anxiety listening proposes. It is revealed from the interviews that high anxious students generally find listening difficult and when they face a difficulty they feel anxious. The following high anxious student excerpt illustrates this point.

(\textbf{High Anxious Student})

“When I’m doing listening... I’m stuck on a word... If I don’t understand a word... I can’t listen. I don’t like listening... It is very difficult…”

On the other hand, low anxious students can overcome difficulties listening imposes and tolerate ambiguities while listening in the target language. The following low anxious student expresses his ideas about the difficulties of listening and how to overcome these as:

(\textbf{Low Anxious Student})

“I’m not very good at listening... but it’s ok. I sometimes don’t understand a word but I don’t care. I just listen and Try to understand what it is about... But... I like reading more…”

Another question in the interviews was about whether the students use listening strategies of any kind to ease their understanding and comprehension during listening. Three high anxious students were aware of listening strategies but reported that they did not employ effective listening strategies. The remaining two high anxious students did not know the concept of strategy use. In contrast, all five low anxious students were aware of FL listening strategy use and employed some strategies such as trying to find the main idea or understanding gist. Moreover, while listening in real life low anxious students reported to use clarification requests and repairs to overcome misunderstandings.

In the interviews, the students were also asked whether they think there is a relationship between FL listening anxiety and strategy use while listening in the target language. Of the 10 students, seven (four low anxious, three high anxious students) of them thought there was a relationship as if one felt anxious, he could not use effective strategies and vice versa. Remaining three students (one low anxious, two high anxious) reported that they think there was no relationship between anxiety and strategy use. As a result, interviews supported the statistical findings as when anxiety level increases, strategy use decreases, and vice versa.

4 Conclusion
This study aimed at investigating whether there is a relationship between FL listening anxiety and FL listening strategy use of intermediate level Turkish EFL students. Moreover, this study qualitatively tried to shed light on this issue from the learners’ perspective.

The quantitative findings gathered through FL listening and FL strategy use scales have put forward that when there is an increase in FL listening anxiety of the students, FL listening strategy use decreases and vice versa. Qualitative findings gathered through the interviews with high and low anxious students also supported this finding. High anxious students generally do not employ effective listening strategies and have some concerns while listening in the target language—both in and out of the classroom—compared to low anxious students. The results also pinpoint that low anxious students are even not aware of using listening strategies to ease their comprehension during listening.

One possible implication of these findings is that students need to be trained about listening strategies in the language classroom. Moreover, some opportunities may be created for students to employ various strategies while listening both in and out of the classroom. In this respect, teachers have a crucial role for helping learners become aware of their effective or ineffective strategy use while listening. Then, the first step to lower down anxiety and increase the employment of effective listening strategies would be to administer some instruments such as the ones used in this study. These kinds of self-reporting instruments would create awareness on the students’ behalf and would help them to detect their strengths and weaknesses.

Another implication is designing tasks and activities which are tailored to students’ affective needs. Berne [17] recommends teachers carefully
select the most appropriate listening activities for better performance. Listening anxiety may arouse when the students do not understand what they are going to do or what kind of information s/he should concentrate on for selective listening. Hence, integrating strategy training into classroom activities would help them to see their ineffective habits and focus on efficient listening strategies during tasks and activities.

In the classroom, not only non-participatory listening activities but also participatory listening activities such as taking part in a discussion or debate, collaboratively working with peers on projects or reciting on assigned course materials [18] may also be effective to help learners overcome their anxiety through exposure to various activities and employ strategies during these activities. What is more, students can also be encouraged to listen outside the class.

All in all, findings of this study have yielded a need for taking the affective side of listening into consideration and helping our language learners employ appropriate listening strategies. As a result of such an understanding and guidance, our students may overcome their anxiety and use various appropriate listening strategies when they need.

References: