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## LISTENING STRATEGICALLY FOR ACADEMIC AND APPLIED PURPOSES – IS THERE ANY DIFFERENCE?

**Abstract:** In this paper, different orientations of tertiary-level education (academic and applied) provide the context for research into the ways students perceive the LC process, observed through the prism of metacognitive strategy use. The existing differences in the students' learning backgrounds, L2 learning backgrounds, L2 learning instruction at the tertiary-level educational institutions, and future-profession needs give rise to the premise that the use of MCSs between the two observed groups of students would greatly differ. The research data collected by MALQ (Vandergrift et al., 2006) are analysed by means of descriptive statistics. The obtained results are of twofold significance. On one hand, they make a proper contribution to the scarce literature on LC in Serbia, pointing to further directions of its research. On the other, the discussion of the obtained results provides guidelines for foreign language instruction (regarding both LC and metacognitive strategies) and materials development.

**Key words:** L2 listening, listening comprehension strategies, metacognitive strategies, metacognitive strategy use

### 1. Introduction

Foreign language (FL) learning at the tertiary level of education poses many issues, one of them being developing listening comprehension (LC). As the content of an FL programme is related to and defined by the needs of future professions, it means that the field of study provides a specific context for acquiring field-specific language and developing related skills. The aim of this paper is to look into whether and in which way the subcontext of tertiary-level FL learning defined by future-profession needs, L2 learning background, and tertiary-level setting/demands influence learners' behaviour while listening. For the purpose of this paper, LC performance is observed indirectly, through the prism of the use of metacognitive strategies (MCS).

The notion of context in the paper is taken in a broad sense as the field of study, i.e. tourism and hospitality, with two subcategories defined by the different natures of the studies, i.e. academic and applied. Though both are tourism-oriented, the former enroll students with much higher high school achievement and learning capacity, as well as much higher aspirations than those pursuing applied studies, which, in addition to the number of classes and scope of study at the tertiary level, makes them substantially so different that they actually represent two subcontexts.

## 2. L2 listening

LC is the basic skill used in communication among tourism and hospitality professionals. Further, it is the primary channel of language input and the basis of oral communication recognised as 'a critical component of English language learners' communicative competence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century' (Goh, 2014:1). According to Vandergrift (2004), effective listening makes for a significant predictor of learners' achievement. However, based on the results obtained in an earlier study, Mendelsohn (2002) maintains that students are not skilled enough in listening to be able to understand the information communicated in lectures.

In the authors' experience, L2 LC, be it the very act of understanding or approaching a listening task in the proper way, has shown to be a rather frustrating activity in an EFL classroom. Such an impression is only confirmed by the results obtained by Savitri and Anam (2018), whose research has pointed to the fact that even English Department students still face LC problems. One of the possible reasons could be the fact that in most EFL classroom contexts, LC tasks more closely focus on understanding than practising, which results in poor awareness of listening strategies. Moreover, language learners do not become used to thinking about their learning process, which negatively influences metacognitive strategy use. Such a situation calls for a dramatic change in the approach to teaching listening. Such a stance is also confirmed by Goh (2010). Motivated by the underperformance of her students in LC, she used Vandergrift's idea (Vandergrift 2004) of activating learners' cognition, i.e. she introduced pair and group discussions to her LC classes. The result of her efforts was twofold. On one hand, the learners' understanding of listening materials improved, whereas, on the other hand, learners showed more skillful mastery of strategy use. Such a result imposes a conclusion that the proper solution to LC problems arising in FL classrooms is the introduction of strategy-based instruction, i.e. equipping learners with strategies that would enable their control over the learning process or, to be more precise, introducing metacognitive instruction.

## 3. LC strategies

LC strategies have been the focus of researchers' attention worldwide for a few decades now. As a result of this research, several taxonomies have been proposed so far, the most commonly used being cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies. Used for managing different types of knowledge and behaviour, these three strategy types influence the process of comprehension in different ways. Thus, cognitive strategies are used for learning/listening material manipulation, i.e. for making unconscious interactions with the material to be learned. Metacognitive strategies relate to conscious control over the learning process and consider the ways students learn and react to emerging problems, i.e. managing the learning process. Socio-affective strategies are used to manage emotions or enable interaction with

peers. The most commonly accepted taxonomy in recent works is the one suggested by Vandergrift and Goh (2012: 277-284), which advocates twelve different strategy groups representing mental processes and forms of learning behaviour. They can be further divided into online strategies, i.e. the ones used during the process of LC, and off-line strategies, i.e. those used in pre- and post-listening phases. Seven of the proposed twelve strategies directly facilitate cognitive processing during listening. Those are: *focusing attention*, *monitoring*, *evaluation*, *inferencing*, *elaboration*, *contextualisation* and *reorganising*. Two strategies are used in the pre-listening phase to help learners prepare for listening—*planning* and *prediction*, whereas *monitoring* and *evaluation* are used in the post-listening phase of comprehension. The use of *linguistic and learning resources* is of help in overall listening development. The last two strategies, *cooperation* and *managing emotions*, are used in ‘face-to-face interaction listening or high stakes one-way listening situations’ (Goh 2014: 5).

### 3.1 Listening and metacognition

Having chosen to observe student behaviour while listening, MCSs appeared to be the perfect indicators of the processes underlying their LC. According to Anderson (2002: 2), metacognition is referred to as ‘thinking about thinking’. A more recent definition proposed by Vandergrift and Goh (2012, p. 84) explains metacognition as the factor which ‘enables us to be agents of our own thinking’. The driving forces of metacognitive behaviour are metacognitive strategies, i.e. ‘tools for analysing new information and situations’ (van Velzen 2012: 368). Wenden (1998: 519) offers a more elaborate definition of metacognitive strategies as ‘general skills through which learners manage, direct, regulate, and guide their learning, i.e. planning, monitoring and evaluating’. In this respect, Anderson (2002: 2) divides the concept of metacognition into five main subprocesses: (1) preparing and planning for learning, (2) selecting and using learning strategies, (3) monitoring strategy use, (4) orchestrating various strategies, and (5) evaluating strategy use and learning. It is important to note that these processes, i.e. strategies, are not used independently, but rather in a harmonised way.

The up-to-date literature on FL LC has shown that irrespective of their age group, learners have a rather high level of metacognitive knowledge. A number of studies have confirmed that elementary school learners are able to identify task factors that negatively influence their comprehension as well as the strategies which can help them overcome these problems (Goh and Taib 2006, Goh and Kaur 2013, Kaur 2017, Vandergrift 2002). The research on LC among adult language learners has also pointed to a rather satisfactory level of metacognitive knowledge and, at the same time, the existing awareness of the strengths and limitations of the strategies used (Cross 2009, 2010, Goh 1999, Graham 2006, Zeng 2018, Zhang and Goh 2006). Although intuitively aware of some of the available strategies to overcome LC problem(s), learners are in need of systematically developed metacognitive instruction in order to master the use of this strategy type.

A number of studies undertaken so far have shown a positive correlation between metacognitive knowledge and LC performance (Chamot 2005, Goh and Taib

2006, Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari 2010, Zeng 2018). In this respect, the subjects who were exposed to metacognitive instruction outperformed those who received no information on MCSs in an explicit way. On the other hand, the beneficial effect of MCS instruction on metacognitive knowledge has been confirmed by Graham (2006), Cross (2011), Goh (2000, 2005), Vandergrift (2003), Vandergrift and Goh (2012), Goh and Taib (2006), Liu and Goh (2006), Vandergrift (2004) and Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010).

#### 4. Research description

In our paper, different orientations of tertiary-level education (academic and applied) provide the context for research into the ways students perceive the LC process, observed through the prism of metacognitive strategy use. To this end, MALQ (Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal and Tafaghodtari 2006) is used to collect data, which are analysed by means of descriptive statistics.

##### 4.1 Motivation for the research

The scarce literature describing LC research undertaken in Serbia provides almost no results on MCS use among the tertiary-level student population. Thus, the basic motivation for the research was to provide an insight into context-specific metastrategic behaviour of tertiary-level students. On the other hand, it is justifiable to expect that two different subcontexts would provide a solid basis for different student behaviour resulting in different LC performance. Therefore, the research is designed so as to compare the use of MCSs between the students of academic studies and those of applied ones during LC.

##### 4.2 Research setting

The research was undertaken with two groups of subjects studying tourism and hospitality at the tertiary level of education in Serbia. The first one consisted of 130 students of academic studies (Faculty of Hotel Management and Tourism in Vrnjacka Banja, University of Kragujevac), whereas the second one comprised 186 students of applied studies (College of Applied Sciences Užice). Table 1 provides a more detailed description of the subjects, i.e. their learning background, L2 learning background, L2 instruction at the tertiary-level institution, as well as the positions they are educated for. These make distinctive features between the two subcontexts where LC is observed.

Study context	Subcontext 1: Academic studies	Subcontext 2: Applied studies
Learning background	4-year secondary education; mostly general	3- and 4-year vocational secondary education
L2 learning background	12 years of L2 learning prior to entering university	11-12 years of L2 learning before entering college

L2 instruction at the tertiary-level institution	4 years of study/4 semesters (5+5+5+6 classes a week); at least B2 level	2 years of study/2 semesters (3+4) classes a week); B1 level
Future profession	Managerial staff	Associate positions (primarily entry-level ones)

Table 1. Research setting

The expectations considering the way subjects behave in the process of LC were conditioned by the subcontext settings described in Table 1. In this respect, university students are expected to have better proficiency in L2 knowledge and be more skilled in using MCSs—more often and in a wider range than college students—and will therefore approach an LC task in a more active way. They are supposed to have stronger extrinsic motivation to learn an L2 (Đurović and Silaški, 2014), which should further positively influence their MC behaviour. Thus, the subcontext of university studies is expected to provide a more active and positive setting for MCS use and LC skill development. On the other hand, the subjects within the applied studies subcontext are expected to recognise MCSs and use them in a somewhat restricted way.

In this regard, the current research focused on (1) determining the skillfulness of students studying in different subcontexts in using MCSs, (2) identifying the difference in MC behaviour between the observed groups of students and (3) defining the most often used strategies by both groups.

The data were collected by means of MALQ – Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (Vandergrift et al., 2006), which was translated into Serbian so as to avoid any possible misunderstanding on the part of the subjects.

## 5. Research results

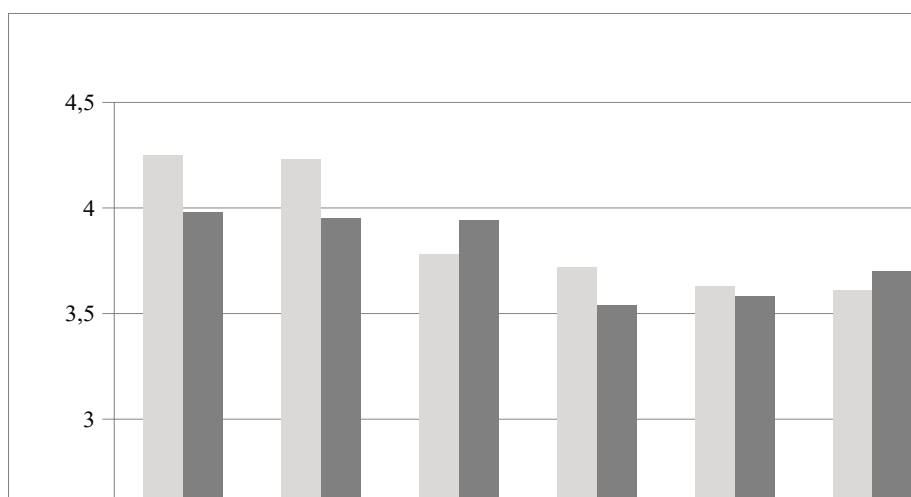
### 5.1 Metacognitive skillfulness

With the mean of 3.209, i.e. 3.212 for university and college students, respectively, the two groups of the observed population can be classified as medium-frequency MCS users. It is also obvious that the use of strategies of these two groups is almost unified. In other words, the observed population has an awareness of metacognitive strategies, but their use is rather random.

### 5.2. Differences in listening for academic and applied purposes

Research Question 2 addresses the difference in MC behaviour between university students and college students while listening. The research results point to the fact that out of 21 questionnaire items representing 5 different groups of (sub) strategies, university students use 8 items, i.e. 4 strategy types with high frequency, whereas college students use 7 items, i.e. 3 different strategies. The rate of use ranges between 3.5 and 4.25. Such a result points to an almost unified strategy use

by university and college students of tourism. Namely, on the whole, a rather small discrepancy can be noted in strategy use between the two observed groups, with the biggest value of 0.28 reflected in the use of Item 5 (Problem solving – Guessing: *I use the words I understand to guess the meaning of the words I don't understand*), whereas the smallest one of 0.05 can be noted in the use of Item 7 (Problem solving – Activating schemata: *As I listen, I compare what I understand with what I know about the topic*). It is obvious that Items 2 (Directed attention: *I focus harder on the text when I have trouble understanding*) and 13 (Problem solving – Monitoring: *As I listen, I quickly adjust my interpretation if I realise that it is not correct*) are used slightly more often by the students of applied studies.



Source: Result findings

Graph 1. Metacognitive strategy use by tourism and hospitality students

### 5.3. Most often used MCSs

The overview of the most often used MCSs by the group of university, i.e. college students, is provided in Table 2 and Table 3, respectively.

Table 2 data point to the fact that the most often used strategies by the students of academic studies are *problem solving*, followed by *mental translation* and *directed attention*, while *evaluation during listening* is the least rated high-frequency strategy.

Rank	Item	Strategy	Academic	
			Mean	SD
1	9. I use my experience and knowledge to help me understand.	Problem solving	4.25	0.94
2	5. I use the words I understand to guess the meaning of the words I don't understand.	Problem solving	4.23	1.06
3	2. I focus harder on the text when I have trouble understanding.	Directed attention	3.78	0.99
4	11. I translate key words as I listen.	Mental translation	3.72	1.25

5	7. As I listen, I compare what I understand with what I know about the topic.	Problem solving	3.63	1.28
6	13. As I listen, I quickly adjust my interpretation if I realise that it is not correct.	Problem solving	3.61	1.09
7	4. I translate in my head as I listen.	Mental translation	3.57	1.32
8	20. As I listen, I periodically ask myself if I am satisfied with my level of comprehension.	Evaluation	3.56	1.22

Source: Result findings

Table 2. Metacognitive strategy use by university students of tourism and hospitality

Comparing the MCS use of the students of applied studies with that of the students of academic studies, only a slight fluctuation is noted.

Rank	Item	Strategy	Applied	
			Mean	SD
1	9. I use my experience and knowledge to help me understand.	Problem solving	3.98	0.96
2	5. I use the words I understand to guess the meaning of the words I don't understand.	Problem solving	3.95	1.08
3	2. I focus harder on the text when I have trouble understanding.	Directed attention	3.94	1.08
4	13. As I listen, I quickly adjust my interpretation if I realise that it is not correct.	Problem solving	3.70	1.09
5	7. As I listen, I compare what I understand with what I know about the topic.	Problem solving	3.58	0.98
6	11. I translate key words as I listen.	Mental translation	3.54	1.30
7	12. I try to get back on track when I lose concentration.	Directed attention	3.53	1.63

Source: Result findings

Table 3. Metacognitive strategy use by college students of tourism and hospitality

Namely, as Table 3 shows, the most often used strategies belong to the group of *problem solving*, represented by three different substrategies: activating schemata, monitoring and guessing. These are followed by *focusing attention* strategies, with two items representing directed attention, while *mental translation* is represented by one item only.

## 6. Results interpretation and pedagogical implications

The obtained mean describes both groups of students as medium-frequency MCS users. Furthermore, the use of MCSs of the two observed groups is almost unified. Such a result deviates from the ones achieved by Goh (1997, 1998) and Vandergrift (1997), which confirmed that metacognitive knowledge about listening of high-skilled listeners at the tertiary level of education is almost twice as big as that of low-skilled listeners, i.e. they used more various strategies compared to the

less-skilled learners. It is also in contrast with the defined expectations. Namely, the results show that the subcontext of university studies failed to provide a positive setting for a more active use of MCSs.

The lack of systematic MCS use by the observed population goes in favour of an unsystematic approach to LC. Such a result is below expectations, keeping in mind the importance of language knowledge, especially LC for the future professions of the observed groups. It is also less favourable than the result obtained by Knežević and Luković Vojnović (2018), which shows tourism students as high-frequency MCS users (the average mean of MCS use - 3.85), or Li (2013), who found that non-English major university students use MCSs with the mean of 3.65. However, the results obtained in our study coincide with those achieved by Goh (1998). Namely, comparing learners' strategy knowledge and their strategy use, she came to the conclusion that despite being aware of useful strategies, learners do not demonstrate attempts to use them. This was prescribed to a spontaneous, rather than conscious, strategy use.

Important tools of successful learning, in an FL or other subject matter, as well as a means of building an independent learner (Pešić and Marinković 2016), MCSs should be used to enhance the overall learning ability of tertiary-level students, thus contributing to an improved LC ability as well. In this regard, it would be necessary to provide students studying in both subcontexts with MCS instruction in a systematic way, both at the level of a task as well as at the level of the overall language acquisition.

Although it is valid to expect a different pattern in MC behaviour of the observed groups of students based on different subcontexts, the results point to unified MC activity. Namely, the consideration of the obtained results for both subcontexts points out that all most-frequently-used strategies (problem solving, directed attention, mental translation, and evaluation) are employed during LC tasks, i.e. they are all online strategies. This is in contrast with the results obtained by Goh (1998), where an active strategy use can be identified during the whole LC process. Her research findings point to the following strategies as the most frequently used ones: inference, fixation, contextualization, comprehension, monitoring, directed attention, and selective attention. Apart from a rather limited number of strategies used, the results obtained in our research, however, point to the lack of strategy use in both pre- and post-listening activity, which only confirms the fact that an LC task is approached in an unsystematic way by both groups of students. In other words, students do not use the strategies that would make their LC easier, such as advance planning, or reflecting after-task completion, which would result in a better control of the LC process in the following tasks. Such a situation only confirms the arising need to instruct students to control their LC process in a conscious way by employing MCSs. Special attention should be given to those strategies which can be used during pre- and post-listening phases, as they are not employed by the observed population.

As for the most frequently used strategies, according to the research results, problem solving appears to be the most frequently used one by both groups of subjects. The problem solving strategies group comprises online strategies which are



employed to overcome the problems arising while listening. Vandergrift et al. (2006) hold that these strategies are used to infer meaning and to monitor if the inferences are correct. The data presented in Table 2 and Table 3 show that the four items used with high frequency by both groups of subjects belonging to this subgroup are schemata activation (items 9 and 13), monitoring inferencing (Item 7) and guessing (Item 5) (*I use my experience and knowledge to help me understand; I use the words I understand to guess the meaning of the words I don't understand; As I listen, I quickly adjust my interpretation if I realise that it is not correct, and As I listen, I compare what I understand with what I know about the topic*). One of the possible reasons for such frequent employment of this group of strategies could be the problems students face in the process of LC. Still, it should not be forgotten that the use of schemata and inferencing represent the most useful means of improving LC, and as such, their use should be further fostered. The importance of schemata activation, i.e. the use of prior knowledge the listeners bring to the task in the process of LC, is also confirmed by the studies undertaken so far (Goh 1998, Goh and Taib 2006, Graham, Santos, and Vanderplank 2011, Zeng 2018), where it is described as the most critical strategy for the process of understanding.

Directed attention strategies are those that students use to concentrate and stay on task, which is an unavoidable precondition for successful comprehension. However, the research results point to difficulties that students face in regaining concentration in the process of listening. Such a result is in contrast with those obtained by Yang (2009) and Selamat and Sidhu (2013), which both confirm high frequency use of this strategy type. In this regard, MCS training with the observed population should be focused on developing the ability to maintain concentration while receiving incoming information. One way of achieving this is by focusing listening tasks on one activity only, which should be followed by a discussion on the strategies used. This is the most productive way of avoiding multitasking while listening and depriving students of the pressure they might feel during LC.

The set of mental translation strategies represents transferring ideas from L2 into L1. According to the research results, these strategies are more often used by university students, which is represented by *translating key words* and *translating in their heads as they listen*. Although the mother tongue interference is not taken as beneficial in L2 acquisition and, more specifically, LC, Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010) closely relate key word translation with inferencing strategy, which includes this substrategy into the group of useful ones. Cohen and Allison (2000) state that research in the areas of reading and writing shows that learners' comprehension could be assisted by selective translation into their mother tongue. Despite such a stance, the results obtained by Vandergrift (1997, 2003) confirm that only beginner language learners use translation in the process of LC, whereas it is not used by intermediate level learners, who use a wider range of metacognitive strategies, such as monitoring. However, the results obtained in the current research are in line with the ones obtained by Selamat and Sidhu (2013), who report high percentages of respondents using translation in the process of LC (49% using word-for-word translation and 62% using key word translation).

Performance evaluation is considered to be both an online and off-line appraisal of whether comprehension goals are realised. The obtained results show that only online evaluation is used with high frequency by the group of university students. Keeping in mind the beneficial nature of this strategy type, especially post-listening evaluation, MCS instruction should particularly address the issue of evaluation. Students should be invited to reflect on the difficulties they faced during the course of listening. Special attention should also be given to considering the possible reasons for the problems they encountered. These discussions could also be used as a proper self-confidence boosting stage, where students would be invited to remember all the strategies used with success. In such a way, students would be trained to approach a task in an active way.

Overall, apart from using evaluation while listening, distinctive features between two different subcontexts did not otherwise influence the MC behaviour of the observed groups of students.

## 7. Concluding remarks

The obtained research results show that, regardless of the observed subcontexts, the LC process is not approached in an active and systematic way by either group of students. The premise that university students would be more involved in approaching LC tasks did not prove to be correct. Namely, both university and college students proved to be medium-frequency MCS users, which can be taken as underperformance in LC. Furthermore, both groups used MCSs in a rather unified way, which, for the observed population, means that neither background learning experience nor language learning experience are factors that make a significant difference in the way university and college students approach an LC task, i.e. they do not significantly influence the choice of the MCSs used by the observed population. Generally speaking, such a result points to a necessity on the part of language instructors to introduce metacognitive instruction in language learning classes. The existing awareness of MCSs should be used as a starting point for further development of conscious metacognitive behaviour of tertiary-level students, i.e. to the development of MC behavioral patterns leading to a more controlled approach to LC, which can be further transferred to the conscious development of language learning skills as well as to the acquisition of different subject matter. Despite the unsystematic way of approaching an LC task, the obtained results pointing to the most frequently used MCSs coincide with those gained in previous research worldwide.

In order to help students gain control over their learning process, it would be advisable to include MCS instruction in the FL curriculum. The obtained results give rise to proposing a unified MCS development programme to tertiary-level students, regardless of the context of their studies. Training students in MCS use and helping them find the most useful ones that would work for themselves as individuals is something that changes the role of an FL tertiary-level instructor, broadening the scope of FL classes from 'what' to learn to include 'how' to learn, as well. At the same

time, it also poses a call for adapting already existing teaching materials or writing new ones to include MCS training activities tailored to a specific teaching context.

The limitations of the current study primarily refer to the narrow scope of subjects. Further research should address a larger population of students studying within different contexts. It would be interesting to include students of philology, as they are the pillars-to-be of the teaching process. It would also be interesting to gain an insight into the use of other strategies, i.e. cognitive and socio-affective ones.

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## УПОТРЕБА СТРАТЕГИЈА СЛУШАЊА ПРИ РАЗУМЕВАЊУ ГОВОРА КОД СТУДЕНАТА АКАДЕМСКИХ И СТРУКОВНИХ СТУДИЈА – ПОСТОЈИ ЛИ РАЗЛИКА?

Резиме

Упркос чињеници да је разумевање говора од превасходне важности за усвајање страног језика, проблеми са којима се при разумевању сусрећу студенти упућују на то да овој вештини није поклоњена потребна пажња у настави страног језика. Како је овај проблем дубоко укорееен, његово решење изискује систематичан приступ. У том смислу, студенти би требало да буду упознати са могућношћу да управљају сопственим процесом усвајања језика, па самим тим и разумевања говора. Другим речима, потребно је код њих пробудити свест о метакогницији. У нашем истраживању, академске и струковне студије туризма и хотелијерства представљају контекст у ком је испитивана употреба метакогнитивних стратегија, како би се сагледао начин на који испитаници приступају задатку разумевања говора. Подаци су прикупљени уз помоћ МАЛ упитника (МАЛQ, Вандергрифт и остали 2006). Резултати до којих се спроведеним истраживањем дошло упућују на уједначену употребу стратегија обеју група испитаника, што је у супротности са полазним очекивањима. То даље наводи на закључак да контекст у ком је страни језик усвајан раније, као и контекст у ком се настава страног језика одвија на високошколској установи не представљају факторе који у битној мери утичу на понашање испитаника када је у питању приступање задатку разумевања говора и управљање процесом разумевања. Иако свесни метакогнитивних стратегија, испитаници их користе несистематично и само у току самог процеса разумевања, што сведочи о одсуству планираног и контролисаног приступа разумевању, али и мањкавости наставе која би требало да студенте упозна са стратегијама слушања и оспособи их да дате стратегије ефиксно користе. Решење које се намеће јесте увођење стратегијски оријентисане наставе која би била усмерена на увежбавање вештине разумевања говора.

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