



## The Relationship between the Parroting and Listening Comprehension Abilities of the Undergraduate EFL Learners

Moslem FATOLLAHI<sup>1,\*</sup>, Naser FALLAH<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Lecturer, University of Zabol, Iran

Received: 01.02.2015; Accepted: 05.05.2015

**Abstract.** Parroting is a widely applied technique in simultaneous interpreter training programs. This technique mainly involves repetition after an audio track at a premium flow of speech with a time delay of about three seconds. Parroting has been comprehensively discussed in the field of interpretation. Yet, it has been mainly ignored in TEFL. This article aims at exploring the relationship between the parroting and listening comprehension abilities of a group of undergraduate EFL learners. The obtained results revealed the significant relationship between the parroting ability of the subjects and their performance on the listening section of the Paper-Based TOEFL. As a pedagogical implication, parroting might be applied as a useful technique for improving the listening comprehension ability of the EFL students.

**Keywords:** Parroting, interpretation, Listening Comprehension, EFL learners

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Parroting Technique in Interpreting

The parroting technique has often been used by cognitive psychologists as an instrument of investigating selective attention in humans. In other words, “subjects hear one message in one ear, and a different message in the other ear, and are asked to ignore one message while attending to the other for subsequent recall” (Kraushaar and Lambert, 1987: p.154). But parroting is also frequently used in various programs of interpretation training as part of the training procedure with novice interpreters who first should learn to listen and speak simultaneously in the same language before attempting to interpret from one language to another (Kraushaar and Lambert, 1987: p.154). Parroting has also been considered in different fields of interpreting and by different scholars (e.g. Angelelli, 2004; Corsellis, 2008).

Parroting is one of the applicable techniques mainly applied in interpreter training programs. During parroting, an individual repeats after another voice after a time gap of a few seconds (often called decolage). Parroting is very helpful as an exercise to prepare for simultaneous interpretation training, for the clear reason that we can learn to speak after another voice and still listen to the original voice and ourselves (Monacelli, 2009: p. 73).

Upon exercising parroting, interpreting learners would be able to “deliver from memory an interpreted or parroted message that is at least 25 words in length, mimic the style of the original speech, and position themselves in a manner conducive to “transparency” (Salama-Carr, 2007: 24). In this regard, parroting is often regarded as an instrument for improving memory (e.g. in Hale, 2004: p. 113; Angelelli, 2004: p. 137).

\*Corresponding author. *Email address:* m.fatollahi@uoz.ac.ir

## The Relationship between the Parroting and Listening Comprehension Abilities of the Undergraduate EFL Learners

It is worth mentioning that the general perception of the scholars in the field of interpreter training is that the art of interpretation is not merely restricted to parroting, and that interpreters have to go through various cognitive processes to render speech from L1 to L2. However, for parroting, there is no additional complexity of having to reformulate a message and only one language is involved. (e.g. Pochhaker in Valero Garces and Martin, 2008).

The main point to be considered is that parroting is not similar to interpreting at all because parroting can be performed by only repeating the surface form of the audio material. However, this concern is not so important because it has been shown that parrots do analyze the speech up to the semantic layer (Marslen-Wilson, 1973). Yet, the effect of parroting in forming simultaneous interpretation competence has been widely recognized (e.g. Pearl, 2014).

Christoffels and De Groot believe that “in contrast to parroting, in both the paraphrasing and interpreting tasks reformulation is necessary, since in both tasks the meaning of the message has to be extracted and restated into different words, but only in interpreting do two languages have to be activated simultaneously” (Christoffels and De Groot, 2004: p. 228). In spite of that, they maintain that “by comparing performance on these three tasks it may be possible to assess the role of the transformation component and to disentangle the two sub-components of transformation: reformulating a message and doing so in another language” (Christoffels and De Groot, 2004: p. 228).

### 1.2. The Aims of the Present Study

Parroting and listening comprehension abilities have been widely discussed in the two different research areas of TEFL and interpreting studies. Yet, the connection between these two constructs has not been investigated. This is probably due to the fact that parroting remains to have a negative reputation especially in the field of language teaching as it has always been associated with habit-based language learning.

In the present study, authors attempt to find the answer to the following research question:

- Research question: is there any relationship between the listening comprehension ability and the parroting ability of the Iranian undergraduate EFL learners?

To answer the main research question, authors propose a main research hypothesis as follows:

- Research hypothesis: there is a significant direct relationship between the listening comprehension ability and the parroting ability of the Iranian undergraduate EFL learners.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Parroting is a widely discussed concept in the interpretation literature. Christoffels and De Groot (2004) conducted a study to investigate the components of simultaneous interpreting and compare interpreting with parroting and paraphrasing. Their findings revealed that the simultaneity of comprehension and production and the transformation element of parroting affect performance but a mixture of these elements results in a noticeable decrease in performance.

Another study was conducted at the University of Ottawa (Kraushaar and Lambert, 1987) to compare trainee-interpreters' parroting ability in both their first and second languages when parroting audio material presented to one of their ears. In their study, parroting was regarded as a gradual, auditory chasing task which involves the immediate reproduction of the presented voice, that is, word-for-word repetition, in the same language, of a message which was presented to a subject through a set of headphones.

Tonelli and Ricardi (1995) investigated speech errors, parroting and simultaneous interpreting. They investigated the ability of their participants in realizing and retrieving phonological, morphological and lexical errors during parroting. Their findings indicated that subjects tend to overhear phonological errors more than higher-order errors. So, parroting might be used in developing some specific speaking skills (see also Freixas, 2011).

Ghahremani (2013) investigated the effects of implementing summative assessment, formative assessment and dynamic assessment on Iranian EFL learners' listening ability and listening strategy use. The results showed that the learners in dynamic group not only outperformed the other groups in listening ability, but they also applied more listening techniques.

Fatemi, Salamian, & Khakzadan (2013) explored the effect of emailing vocabulary on listening comprehension ability of a group of EFL learners. The findings obtained from the study revealed that the use of e-mail technology can increase their vocabulary and it can result in better listening comprehension ability. Their study gave pedagogical implications to applying e-mail as an effective and easy to perform learning instrument.

Despite the wide range of literature on the subject, almost no study has investigated the relationship between the parroting and the listening comprehension ability. The present research aims at filling the gap.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

As mentioned earlier, this article investigates the relationship between parroting and listening abilities. To ensure the homogeneity of the research sample, a total number of 86 junior and senior undergraduate EFL students of the University of Zabol took the listening section of the Paper-Based TOEFL, and 65 subjects scoring 50 or higher (out of 68) entered the final stage of the study (including 34 females and 31 males).

At the final stage of the study, two tests were administered to the subjects: the first one was a different version of the listening section of the Paper-Based TOEFL, and the second test was the test of parroting. The subjects participated in the study voluntarily, and they were promised to be informed of the study results and their own scores on the two administered tests.

The listening section of TOEFL consisted of 35 questions and was administered in 80 minutes. The test was scored at the range of 31-68. The TOEFL test was selected as the measurement instrument to guarantee the reliability and validity of the listening comprehension scores.

On the other hand, the parroting ability test was designed on the basis of the same listening task administered to the students. One of the six passages of the TOEFL listening section was randomly selected and participants were asked to repeat after the original audio track after a time lag of three second (technically called "decolage"). The parroting performance of the subjects were scored by two raters at the same range of the TOEFL (31-68), based on the raters' perception of the fluency and accuracy of the subjects during fulfilling the task. The reliability of the obtained scores was assessed using inter-rater reliability, and a high reliability rate of 0.893 was achieved.

Upon completion of the tests, the obtained scores were analyzed by SPSS software in order to determine the correlation between the two sets of interval scores. Finally, the study results were demonstrated on Tables and discussed in terms of their significance and implications.

# The Relationship between the Parroting and Listening Comprehension Abilities of the Undergraduate EFL Learners

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned earlier, the obtained scores of the two administered tests for the two groups were recorded. The reliability of the two sets of dedicated scores of the parroting tests (by the two raters) was calculated using inter-rater reliability, and a high reliability rate of 0.893 was achieved. As a result, the average of the two dedicated parroting scores was dedicated to each test-taker. The descriptive statistics of the two sets of score are demonstrated in Table (1).

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics for the two Sets of Scores (Listening and Parroting Abilities)

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation	Max	Min
Listening Comprehension Ability	52.49	3.057	59	47
Parroting Ability	34.86	3.313	52	30

As demonstrated in Table (1), the participants could repeat the scores they had achieved in the pre-test. The average score of the students on the Paper-Based TOEFL's listening section was 52.49. The scores ranged at 47-59.

On the other hand, the obtained average scores for the parroting ability of the subjects indicate that the average score of the participants in this part is 34.86, which reveals the quite low ability of the subjects in fulfilling the parroting task's requirements. The scores ranged from 30 to 52. Further, a standard deviation of 3.313 was observed.

To investigate the relationship between these two sets of scores, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient of the scores was calculated. The Pearson statistical results are demonstrated in Table (2).

**Table 2.** The Pearson Results for the Two Sets of Scores

N	df	Level of Significance	Critical Value	Observed Value
65	63	0.025*	0.254	0.544

As observed in Table (2), the obtained Pearson results for the two sets of scores (listening comprehension and parroting abilities) (0.544) reveal a significant relationship between the performances of the subjects on these two constructs. In other words, subjects with a higher ability in parroting SL conversations after a time gap of three seconds scored higher on the listening comprehension test.

Our findings reveal that parroting should be more focused as a skill which is highly related to listening comprehension ability. The findings of the present study are in line with the idea held by some scholars (e.g. Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Harmer, 2001; Chernov, 2004) who have considered the parrot-fashion learning in audiolingualism as a useful approach for promoting listening ability.

It is worth mentioning that the notion of parroting in the field of simultaneous interpreting is different from parrot-fashion learning in audiolingualism, as the former is highly reliant on short-term memory and multi-tasking(listening and speaking simultaneously).

## 5. CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study explored the relationship between the listening comprehension and the parroting abilities of a group of undergraduate EFL learners, and found a significant relationship between the two mentioned constructs.

Our findings might be interesting to ELT instructors, as parroting might be considered as a useful technique in itself, or as part of a more comprehensive strategy, in teaching listening skills. Further, as parroting is one of the main techniques exercised in interpreter training programs, it can prepare language learners for acting as interpreters especially in its simultaneous mode.

Like any other research, the current study is posed to some limitations. This article was focused on EFL context in the Zabol city of Iran. Future researchers are proposed to conduct the same study in ESL context or in the other universities of Iran. Further, the role of variables such as gender and age, as mediating variables, were not investigated in this study. Future studies can consider these variables.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Angelelli, C. V. (2004). *Medical Interpreting and Cross-Cultural Communications*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [2] Chernov, G. V. (2004). *Inference and Anticipation in Simultaneous Interpreting*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: Benjamins.
- [3] Christoffels, I. K. & De Groot, A. B. (2004). Components of Simultaneous Interpreting: Comparing Interpreting With Shadowing and Paraphrasing. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 7 (3), 227–240.
- [4] Corsellis, A. (2008). *Public Service Interpreting: The First Steps*. Hampshire: Palgrave Textbooks in Translating and Interpreting.
- [5] Fatemi, M., Salamian, M. & Khakzadan, R. (2013). The Effect of Emailing Vocabulary on Listening Comprehension Ability. In *Proceedings of the First National Conference on Teaching, Literature and Translation*, (pp. 26-43). Retrieved from: [http://www.civilica.com/EnPaper--TELT01\\_246.html](http://www.civilica.com/EnPaper--TELT01_246.html).
- [6] Freixas, E. C. (2011). Cognitive Theory of Simultaneous Interpreting and Training. In *Proceedings of the 52nd Conference of the American Translators Association*, (pp. 1-29). Retrieved from: <http://dll.fiu.edu/people/faculty/erik-camayd-freixas/cognitive-theory-2011.pdf>.
- [7] Ghahremani, D. (2013). The Effects of Implementing Summative Assessment, Formative Assessment and Dynamic Assessment on Iranian EFL Learners' Listening Ability and Listening Strategy Use. *Journal of Language and Translation*, 2(5), 59-68.
- [8] Hale, S. B. (2004). *The Discourse of Court Interpreting*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: Benjamins.
- [9] Harmer, J. (2001). *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. 3rd Edition. Essex: Pearson Education Ltd.
- [10] Kraushaar, B., & Lambert, S. (1987). Parroting Proficiency According to Ear of Input and Type of Bilingualism. *Bulletin of the Canadian Association of Applied Linguistics*, 9(1), pp. 17-31.
- [11] Kumaravadivelu, B. (2006). *Understanding Language Teaching: from Method to Post-Method*. London: Laurence Erlbaum.
- [12] Marslen-Wilson, W. (1973). Linguistic Structure and Speech Shadowing at Very Short Latencies. *Nature* 244 (5417): 522–523.
- [13] Monacelli, C. (2009). *Self-Preservation in Simultaneous Interpreting*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: Benjamins.

The Relationship between the Parroting and Listening Comprehension Abilities of the Undergraduate EFL Learners

- [14] Pearl, L. (2014). Evaluating Learning Strategy Components: Being Fair. *Language*, 90(3), 107-114.
- [15] Pochhaker, F. (2004). *Introducing Interpreting Studies*. London & New York: Routledge.
- [16] Salama-Carr, M. (2007). *Translating and Interpreting Conflict*. Amsterdam & New York: Approaches to Translation Studies.
- [17] Tonelli, L. & Ricardi, A. (1995). Speech Errors, Shadowing and Simultaneous Interpretation. *The Interpreters' Newsletter*, 6, 67-74.
- [18] Valero-Garces, C. & Martin, A. (2008). *Crossing Borders in Community Interpreting*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: Benjamins.