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Task characteristics as predictors of Greek EFL test-takers' listening behaviour

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Despite the fact that the relationship between task and strategy use was long ago recognized in the literature, it has not been explored very much (Oxford et al. 2004). The present research employs listening test-tasks and their specific characteristics as predictors for specific listening comprehension strategy use. The definition of task adopted in this paper is the one provided by the Association of Language Testers in Europe (2001) "…a combination of rubric, item and response" [in Brindley and Slatyer, 2002:375].

According to the above definition, a test-task consists of the rubric, the text (listening stimulus or input), the questions (or items) and the responses. The rubrics of tasks especially in language tests are usually standardized and remain the same according to task type. What appear to differentiate each time from test to test are the texts, the questions and the relevant expected responses. The focus of the present analysis will be on the comparison of these three components among specific listening comprehension tasks as found in listening practice tests for specific exam preparation. These tests actually comprise Greek EFL test takers' preparation material for the listening module (i.e. listening tasks) of four popular English language proficiency exams in Greece (i.e. ECCE, FCE, KPG B1/B2 Integrated, and PTE General-Level 3).

The aim of this paper is to highlight the interrelation between specific task characteristics and listeners' strategy use and indicate how these characteristics appear to affect listeners' behaviour in general.

For the aforementioned analysis of the listening comprehension tasks certain automatized tools have been employed. More specifically, the analysis of listening text characteristics was based on the variables investigated by Praat, Co-Metrix and Web-Vocabprofile programmes (Révész and Brunfaut, 2013). Moreover, the categorization of task questions and suggested responses relied on the classification model proposed by Shohamy and Inbar (1991). A presentation of the various listening test tasks' similarities and differences will take place along with a discussion of their impact on test-takers' difficulties and attitudes towards the particular listening tests. Finally, listeners' reported strategy use will be related to the test-tasks under investigation providing information for task specific listening strategy instruction.

References

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