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by

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**AN APPROACH TO CLASSIFYING LISTENING STRATEGIES
FOR USE IN THE ARABIC AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE
CLASSROOM**

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Report

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Dedication

To my mother, Ellen, and my father, Steve.

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Abstract

AN APPROACH TO CLASSIFYING LISTENING STRATEGIES FOR USE IN THE ARABIC AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

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This report sets out to reclassify listening strategies in a way that renders them more transparent to both Arabic language instructors and students, thereby enabling instructors to integrate direct listening strategy instruction into their lesson plans more efficiently. It begins with a review of previous listening strategy research and classifications, commenting on how the existing strategy classifications of “metacognitive,” “cognitive,” and “socio-affective” have fallen short in creating a practical tool for integrating strategy instruction. The report then focuses on the *Al-Kitaab* Arabic textbook series and an analysis of the strategy instruction presented therein, finding that, while there is a strong strategic base presented in the textbooks, continued strategy development is largely abandoned as the series continues. The report attempts to address the lack of transparency in traditional learning strategy classifications, as well as the relative inconsistency of strategy instruction available in Arabic language

course materials, by outlining two tables of listening strategies organized based upon the type of task in which the learner is engaged. The two task types are interpersonal listening and interpretive listening, based upon the definitions of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, and the listening strategies in each table are arranged relatively by proficiency level, ranging from novice to intermediate. The intention of this report is that such a classification will encourage and enable language teachers to integrate strategy instruction that is appropriate for the nature of the type of pedagogic task at hand, thereby rendering language learners better prepared to deal with real-world interpersonal and interpretive listening situations.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Much of the scholarly writing conducted on the topic of foreign language listening has lamented the traditional position of listening as the proverbial “black sheep” of the language skills family: often disregarded and, when dealt with, frequently treated inadequately. Flowerdew and Miller (2005, pp. 3-20) examine the role that listening played in foreign language classrooms following various methodologies throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, effectively illustrating how the function of listening in the classroom is highly subject to the pedagogic trends of the day. Just as scholars of foreign language listening generally agree upon the short shrift given to listening over the years, so too do they agree upon the benefit of listening strategy use and explicit strategy instruction in the foreign language classroom. Despite a rich body of research on listening strategy use and strategy instruction in general, however, there remains a lack of a practical model that aids instructors in organizing and selecting appropriate listening strategies to incorporate into classroom instruction. Such a resource would provide a valuable tool to language instructors who are interested in incorporating strategy instruction into their listening lessons but who do not have time to pore over strategy research and translate it into classroom practice, or who feel unsure as to how to proceed in such an endeavor.

To this end, this research seeks to set out a model to aid instructors in integrating explicit strategy instruction into listening activities in the context of the foreign language classroom. The second chapter presents a review of recent literature on second language listening and strategies. The third chapter then examines listening strategies as presented

in the *Al-Kitaab* textbook series, course materials used in first and second-year Arabic classes at the University of Texas at Austin. The fourth chapter seeks to re-analyze listening strategies and present them in a way that renders them more readily integrated into listening lessons at the novice and intermediate levels. Finally, the fifth chapter discusses the limitations and implications of this study, as well as possible directions for future strategy research.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Background on Foreign Language Listening and Learning Strategies

2.1 LISTENING AND ITS ROLE IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

2.1.1 Approaches to Teaching Listening

Listening is essentially universally recognized as a key foreign language skill for successful communication alongside speaking, writing, and reading; this is evidenced by all stakeholders in the language learning process. At the national level, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (henceforth referred to as ACTFL) has provided guidelines for proficiency in all four language skills, including listening, from the novice through distinguished levels (2012b). Additionally, language learning materials such as textbooks often now include online components or at the very least CDs or DVDs with additional listening practice. At the institutional level, universities, colleges, and even some high schools often provide listening opportunities through listening labs, language clubs, or foreign language-themed social events like film screenings. Language instructors and administrators also play a role in this through designing course syllabi and potentially including “no English” clauses, with the implication being that class time is a precious opportunity for speaking and listening in the target language and should therefore be capitalized upon to the fullest extent possible. The importance of listening is similarly highlighted when instructors and administrators set learning outcomes that include a focus on the development of listening skills in the target language. Finally, at the level of foreign language learners, there is often the

expectation that listening skills will be covered, built upon, and assessed at some point during the learning experience, in some form.

Views about the purpose and benefit of listening, however, have not always aligned with these current trends. Flowerdew and Miller (2005, pp. 3-20) provide an excellent overview of past methodological approaches to foreign language teaching in general, and specifically how each approach shaped the role that listening would play within its own framework. More traditional methods have generally failed to give listening skills due consideration, or have simply disregarded listening altogether. An example of the latter would be if students were learning a foreign language in a classroom following the classic grammar-translation approach. In such a setting, they might never listen to the L2, or may listen only in preparation for translating lexical or grammatical items into their L1. As Brandl (2008, p. 2) points out, spontaneous interaction with the language in the pursuit of building oral proficiency was often viewed as a phenomenon that takes place outside of the foreign language classroom, once the student has traveled abroad. Alternatively, if in a classroom following the audio-lingual approach, students listen to the L2 and repeat formulaic responses to highly structured questions, substituting a new noun, verb, etc. in each utterance. It is apparent that the visions underlying these methods are significantly removed from the emphasis placed on spontaneous, real-world language use today; however, that is not to say that elements of these approaches offer nothing of merit to the foreign language instructor or student. Indeed, it is rare to see a foreign language classroom that does not include (for better or for worse) elements of these methodologies. This may be related to how languages have

traditionally been taught in the United States, as well as to the particular expectations and goals of students, instructors, and language programs as a whole.

In the face of the dominance of grammar-translation method, and in response to its lack of emphasis on oral proficiency (ibid.), came the direct-method approach, made famous by Maximilian Berlitz and the associated language schools. This method of instruction placed heavy emphasis on developing students' speaking and listening skills and required a (usually native speaker) instructor to communicate with students exclusively in the target language, relying upon gesture and props instead of a common L1 for clarification (Flowerdew and Miller, 2005, pp. 4-6). While this may initially appear to be a significant improvement for the status of listening in the foreign language classroom, Flowerdew and Miller (ibid.) warn that this appearance is deceiving:

[A]lthough the target language was used for all purposes in the classroom, there was no systematic attempt at *teaching* listening or at developing listening strategies in the learners. The teacher assumed that the students could hear what was being said and that comprehension would follow later... (p. 6)

Thus, although listening was recognized as an essential element of (and tool for) language learning, the efficacy of developing listening skills in pure direct-method approach classrooms still remains in question.

The two methodologies that are most often reflected in foreign language classrooms today are the communicative approach and the task-based approach, which have gained popularity since the 1970s and 1980s, respectively. In the communicative

approach, students use listening as a tool in service of a larger cooperative process or linguistic task to be completed in conjunction with their peers. (An in-depth discussion of communicative language teaching may be found in Brandl, 2008, pp. 5-23) Particularly significant to this approach, as Flowerdew and Miller (*ibid.*, p. 13) point out, is the presence of information gaps between the students; since students are reliant upon their peers in order to complete an activity, listening effectively becomes a key component of the successful fulfillment of a task. Learning experiences like these may also provide students with the opportunity to explore pragmatic issues relating to listening, such as how to repair a communicative breakdown, or how to check to be certain that a partner has understood an utterance. The task-based approach, finally, is based on real-world objectives that students could be expected to carry out in their L2, such as planning a vacation itinerary in a country where the target language is spoken, for example. In their discussion, Flowerdew and Miller (*ibid.*, pp. 14-15) cite a rather contrived task-based activity where students listen to a recorded conversation about the steps required to use a pay phone and label a drawing of a phone with these steps, cautioning that not all pedagogical tasks are actually reflective of what student listeners would do with the language in real life. Therefore, while the devotion of this approach to authentic situations is laudable, care should be taken to ensure that the material as well as the task that the students perform are authentic and reasonable for the given situation to the greatest degree possible.

2.1.2 Understandings of Listening

With the increased attention that listening in general has received in more recent times, there has also been important progress in our understanding of how listening may work as a process. Jack Richards (in the preface to Flowerdew and Miller, 2005) describes how this gradual transformation occurred in views toward listening and its role in foreign language learning:

The changed status of listening in recent years was partly prompted by Krashen's emphasis on the role of comprehension and comprehensible input in triggering language development. In the 1980s and 1990s, applied linguists also began to borrow new theoretical models of comprehension from the field of cognitive psychology. It was from this source that the distinction between bottom-up processing and top-down processing was derived - a distinction that led to an awareness of the importance of background knowledge and schema in comprehension. Listeners were viewed as actively involved in constructing meaning based on expectations, inferences, intentions, prior knowledge, and selective processing of the input. Listening came to be viewed as an interpretive process. (p. ix)

The result of these developments represents an enormous change from past expectations of student listeners. No longer is listening viewed as a "passive" skill and a mere tool for accessing or assessing grammatical knowledge or producing translations; rather, it is seen

as its own “active” interpretive skill, reliant on deeply personal and varied student backgrounds as well as each student’s cognitive processing capabilities.

When making reference to the bottom-up and top-down models of listening, Richards is alluding to two important understandings of listening as a process. In the bottom-up model of listening, grammatical elements are given pride of place, with the prevailing belief being that learners’ understanding of what they hear develops from as low a level as individual phonemes, which are then combined progressively to create words, phrases, clauses, sentences, ideas, and finally, the relationships between them (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005, pp. 24-25). This model, while certainly helpful in the development of close listening skills, often does not account for the “speaker, hearer, or wider context” (ibid., p. 25) in which the listening is taking place. Logically, then, no considerations are made for students’ individual differences and backgrounds and how these elements may shape those students’ listening experiences in a positive or negative fashion.

On the other hand, the top-down model stresses reliance on students’ prior contextual, linguistic, and cultural knowledge and expectations, often referred to as schema, and how students may activate this background knowledge in order to comprehend a listening text (ibid., pp. 25-6) in a holistic manner. While a strict bottom-up approach may render students unable to “see the forest for the trees,” so to speak, a pure top-down approach may be equally problematic, as grammar may be overly deemphasized and the rich opportunities for grammatical exploration presented by the text may go unexplored.

Flowerdew and Miller (*ibid.*, pp. 26-7) finally describe the interactive model of listening, also known as parallel processing, where top-down and bottom-up processes are considered to interact simultaneously during listening and continue to inform and shape each other throughout the entire listening experience. The interactive model appears to be the most suited to account for students' individual differences, a fact that the authors cite as a main benefit of this unifying view:

An important advantage of the interactive model over hierarchical models, whether they be bottom-up or top-down, is that it allows for the possibility of individual variation in linguistic processing. From the pedagogic point of view, this opens up the possibility of a model that is sensitive to individual learning styles, on the one hand, and group needs, on the other. At the level of the individual, some individuals may prefer to rely more on top-down processing, while others may favor an approach with more emphasis on bottom-up processes. At the level of the group, beginners are likely to need to spend more time on developing basic bottom-up skills of decoding. For more advanced learners, however, who have mastered basic phonology and syntax, emphasis on the development of top-down skills of applying schematic knowledge may be more appropriate, although even advanced learners need to work on bottom-up features of fast speech... (p. 27)

Aside from accounting for the significance of individual differences, then, this model also has important implications for how foreign language instructors may

approach teaching listening at various proficiency levels. Although the authors mention that novice-level students will likely require more bottom-up focus than advanced learners, that is not to say that it is fruitless to spend time developing schema from an early stage in the language learning process; similarly, the fact that advanced-level students may find applying schema to be more useful than a strict bottom-up approach does not mean that a close analysis of some grammatical aspects of a listening text is out of the question. As with many issues in education, the ideal combination of approaches will depend on the instructor, the learners, and the particular educational context.

2.2 LEARNING STRATEGIES

2.2.1 What are Learning Strategies Not?

Before examining the most influential theoretical classifications of learning strategies, it may be beneficial to mention briefly what are not considered to be learning strategies. Descriptions of generic learning styles, along with the theory of multiple intelligences famously put forth by Gardner (1983), while helpful in describing the ways or means by which students may prefer to learn, are not necessarily equivalent to the specific strategies they adopt when actually dealing with a foreign language. In a similar vein, Vandergrift and Goh (2012) distinguish “skills” from learning strategies in the realm of listening, citing student awareness and purpose as key factors in this difference:

[L]istening strategies are conscious and goal-directed behaviors, cognitive and social in nature, which learners use to assist their comprehension and learning. Unlike skills, which are automatic processes that make little or no demand on processing capacity, strategies are controlled processes that

require conscious attention in their deployment, modification, and orchestration. (p. 91)

This description touches upon two important aspects of learning strategy use. Firstly, the claim that (listening) strategies may be both cognitive and social has far-reaching implications for how strategies may be employed in the classroom, suggesting an approach to language learning that is both individualized as well as dependent upon student interaction. The other significant point raised here is the fact that the use of learning strategies requires a conscious effort on the part of the student. This provides evidence for the necessity of learning strategy instruction in the foreign language classroom, or at the very least may encourage instructors to discuss strategy use, even informally, with their students. It is not enough simply to assume that students will have the experience to know when and how to apply a helpful and appropriate listening strategy, and the cognitive burden of strategy application should not be ignored.

2.2.2 General Learning Strategies

With the evolution of foreign language pedagogy outlined above and the resulting focus on the individual learner, scholars began to turn their attention to the classification and description of the strategies that learners were apparently using in the classroom. One of the most influential classifications can be found in O'Malley and Chamot (1990), whose theoretical descriptions of language learning strategies formed the basis of many research projects in learning strategy use. The authors categorize language learning strategies as metacognitive, cognitive, or socio-affective, based upon the nature of the strategy itself. Metacognitive strategies, the authors explain, “involve thinking about the

learning process, planning for learning, monitoring the learning task, and evaluating how well one has learned” (p. 137). Such strategies may include pre-planning for the language task by brainstorming, self-monitoring during the task, and self-evaluation after the task is completed. Cognitive strategies, on the other hand, “involve interacting with the material to be learned, manipulating the material mentally or physically, or applying a specific technique to a learning task” (p. 138). This may include strategies such as repeating language “chunks” as they are heard, note-taking during listening, or translating the L2 content into another language. Finally, social and affective strategies “involve interacting with another person to assist learning or using affective control to assist a learning task” (ibid., p. 139). Socio-affective strategies may include asking clarifying questions, working with a partner or group, or positive self-talk and self-reinforcement.

In a similar vein, Oxford (1990) provides another classification system, based not only upon metacognitive, cognitive, and social strategies, but also upon compensation and memory strategies. According to Oxford, compensation strategies “enable learners to use the new language for either comprehension or production despite limitations in knowledge” (p. 47), and include strategies such as using linguistic cues to guess intelligently and overcoming communicative breakdowns through methods such as gesturing or using circumlocution. Memory strategies, meanwhile, are used primarily for the storage and retrieval of information and may include grouping similar new words or structures together or creating a mental link between certain words (ibid., p. 58). O’Malley and Chamot (1990) do not include these latter two strategy categories; however, strategies that Oxford would classify as compensatory would fall under

metacognitive or socio-affective for O'Malley and Chamot, and memory strategies for the former would be treated as cognitive strategies for the latter.

2.2.3 Listening-Specific Classifications of Strategies

In addition to defining these strategies that treat language learning as a whole, scholars in the field of second language acquisition have also attempted to define strategies that apply specifically to listening. Flowerdew and Miller (2005, pp. 72-79) follow O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) classification of strategies into metacognitive, cognitive, and socioaffective. The authors also provide descriptions of what the teacher and learner may be expected to be doing as a part of employing each strategy. For example, in using the metacognitive strategy of creative elaboration, the teacher may ask students to brainstorm different endings to a listening text, and students may then listen and compare and contrast their expectations (and even the vocabulary and grammatical structures they used) with the actual ending of the text. Given how extensive Flowerdew and Miller's list of listening strategies is, it may become more readily applicable to classroom use with some amount of consolidation; for instance, strategies such as "personal elaboration," "world elaboration," and "academic elaboration," (ibid., p. 76) all of which involve the teacher asking students questions in order to activate background schema, could potentially be combined into "activating background schema" for purposes of simplicity.

Although many researchers have employed the categories "metacognitive, cognitive, and socioaffective" when treating listening strategy use, this is certainly not the case universally, and there have been several attempts to reclassify learning strategies in a

way that is more readily applicable to the listening skill. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) present a model for understanding listening strategy use that is based solely on metacognition. In their view, the metacognitive experience of the learner depends upon both metacognitive knowledge (i.e. “knowing and self-appraisal”) and upon strategy use (i.e. “doing and self-management”) (p. 85). Any instance of a language learner utilizing a strategy would therefore be considered metacognitive behavior, whereby the learner “use[s] appropriate strategies to achieve cognitive, social, and affective goals” (ibid., p. 89). Despite the fact that the authors include all strategy use under the umbrella of metacognition, this description of a learner’s “cognitive, social, and affective” goals quickly reveals the influence of O’Malley and Chamot’s strategy classifications upon this alternative paradigm.

Another notable recent reinterpretation of listening strategies may be found in Field (2008), who takes issue with the aforementioned traditional descriptions of metacognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective strategies:

[The O’Malley and Chamot categories] are not very transparent, either to the listening instructor or (very importantly) to the learner.... Strategies that are ‘metacognitive’ in one context may turn out to be ‘cognitive’ in another. If I plan to listen out for stressed words in an utterance, the strategy qualifies as metacognitive, but if I just do it, it becomes cognitive. (p. 294)

Field’s criticism about the nature of strategy classification is significant; as shall be seen later, the vast majority of listening strategy research adopts these categories,

apparently unquestioningly. If, as Field argues, the distinctions between strategy categories are much more fluid than the theoretical models presented by O'Malley and Chamot or Oxford, then this presents a potential validity issue for studies that rely upon these models. When classifying listening strategies, then, Field focuses solely upon communication strategies, "dealing with immediate and often unexpected problems of understanding" (ibid.). He proposes four types of listening strategies, based not upon the apparent nature of the strategy itself, but rather upon the learner's response type to a given listening text. According to Field, learner responses may include the deployment of avoidance, achievement, repair, or pro-active strategies (ibid., pp. 300-301). In employing avoidance strategies, such as abandoning part of a message that is unclear, the learner is responding by internally acknowledging the gaps between his or her understanding and the (yet unclear) full intent of the message. When using achievement strategies, for example forming, checking, and re-forming a hypothesis about meaning, the learner is responding by attempting to understand decoded portions of the message as fully as possible. Repair strategies, meanwhile, involve the learner openly admitting some amount of communicative breakdown by asking for help, repetition, clarification, or confirmation. Field also includes what he terms "pro-active" strategies in this paradigm; in applying strategies pro-actively before the listening takes place, for example by activating schemas relevant to the listening text, the learner is making an active endeavor to facilitate the upcoming listening task. In an effort, then, to avoid the imprecise science of classifying strategies as metacognitive, cognitive, or socio-affective based largely on

the learner's invisible mental processes, Field attempts to reinterpret strategies as learner responses to linguistic input.

2.3 LISTENING STRATEGY RESEARCH

2.3.1 Listening Strategy Usage Among Different Groups of Students

Using the theoretical frameworks provided by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990), many researchers have sought to describe listening strategy behavior as it actually occurs within the foreign language classroom context. One way in which listening strategy use has been analyzed is by its relationship with learner proficiency level. On one hand, Vandergrift (1997) and Farrell and Mallard (2006) found that intermediate-level language learners made more use of listening strategies than their novice or advanced counterparts. In contrast to this, Elkhafaifi (2007), Wu (2008), Lai (2009), Nakatani (2010), and Bidabadi and Yamat (2013) found that advanced-level listeners utilize strategies most heavily. Specifically, Elkhafaifi (2007) and Bidabadi and Yamat (2013) reported that metacognitive strategy use in particular is more common at higher proficiency levels, and Lai (2009) confirmed this and added that lower proficiency students tend to rely more upon social and memory strategies when listening. These findings, if accurate, have two implications: firstly, the higher instance of metacognitive strategy use at higher proficiency levels indicates that novice language learners may be either underexposed to metacognitive strategies or developmentally unready to employ them; secondly, when considering explicit strategy instruction, it may be appropriate to introduce metacognitive, cognitive, and social strategies simultaneously, as novice

learners may be unaware of the benefits of metacognitive strategies if they are unfamiliar with these techniques.

Several studies have also been conducted on the relationship between strategy use and demographic factors like gender and age. Bacon (1992) found that, when dealing with a difficult listening text, men tend to rely more highly on cognitive strategies and bottom-up processing, while women tend to rely more heavily on metacognitive strategies and top-down processing. Similarly, Elkhafaifi's (2007) research on the use of learning strategies across proficiency levels found that females across all levels tend to use strategies more often on average (about 14.5 instances) than men (about 13 instances).

Finally, researchers have also examined affective factors related to foreign language listening. Field (2008) comments that instructing students in listening strategy use can have an immensely positive impact upon those students' affective states:

The ability to understand at least some of what is heard casually has enormous effects upon motivation and convinces the learner of the value of studying a second language. This perspective on L2 listening suggests, then, that an additional further goal of the instructor is to equip the learner to engage in listening which is *strategic*; which does not aim for complete understanding, but tries to make as much as possible of the reduced amount of information that the listener has managed to extract from the signal (p. 286)

This description of listening is enough to paint the process as one that may be hectic for the learner at times, and Mendelsohn (1995) even goes so far as to describe the listener as being “at the mercy of speakers” (p. 132). In this way, then, having an arsenal of strategies to fall back upon may play an important role in motivating language learners to tackle a difficult listening text. Adding credence to these claims of the seriousness of listening anxiety, Elkhafaifi (2005) found a significant positive correlation (.66) between listening anxiety and general foreign language anxiety, along with significant negative correlations between listening anxiety and final listening comprehension grades (-.70) as well as overall course grades (-.65). Chen, Zhang, and Liu (2013) found motivation to be related to higher strategy use, with learners’ total strategy use increasing “by 44% for every unit increased in [self-reported] motivation” (p. 212). Given these results, it seems as though increased student motivation and reduced anxiety are key benefits of listening strategy use.

A key difference in the methodology of these articles (which may be related to the researchers’ personal philosophies regarding describing learning strategies) is the categorization of learning strategies into types. It has been observed here that some authors follow O’Malley and Chamot’s (1990) classification of learning strategies into metacognitive, cognitive, and social-affective strategies, while others follow Oxford’s Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (1990), classifying learning strategies into memory, cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. One could make the case for the superiority of either of these two systems; however, the important point seems to be that there be a consensus in the field of learning strategy research, as this

would facilitate the comparison of results from a wide range of studies without the impediment of a different classification system.

Another recurring potential issue across the field of strategy research is that of the subjects of these studies. In many cases, the language learning background (i.e. how long the participants had been learning the FL, whether or not they had studied other FLs besides their current target language, etc.) of the participants in these studies was unclear. A notable exception was Nakatani (2010), where the researcher provided information about how long the participants had been studying English as well as their standardized test scores. In most other cases, the participants' background information seemed incomplete, with one study (Wu 2008) even grouping the students generally into "higher proficiency" and "lower proficiency" based on grade level and major, measures which do not necessarily reflect language proficiency. Additionally, most of the studies reviewed here relied upon rather small subject groups, with the vast majority of studies including fewer than 100 participants.

Aside from linguistic background information, there are other types of background information missing from many of these studies that, had they been present, may have allowed the researchers to shed light on other factors potentially related to strategy use. The studies reviewed here treated students in different educational and cultural settings, age ranges, and life stages, which prompts the following questions that could represent future directions for the field: How do the differential levels of motivation experienced by students of a language in different educational settings (e.g. high school, university, language institute, etc.) and for different purposes (requirement

for major, elective course, job requirement, etc.) impact listening strategy use? How do learners of different ages and life stages (e.g. a high school student, a university student, a working professional) employ listening strategies? How do learners of various languages (not just ESL) in various cultural settings (e.g. learning a second language, learning a foreign language, in a study abroad program, in the US vs. in Korea, etc.) use listening strategies in different ways?

Another issue related to participants' backgrounds is the myriad foci of these studies. Many of these articles deal with the interactions between listening strategy use and various factors such as proficiency level, gender, motivation, and affective response. Given that each of these factors individually has been shown here to be correlated to listening strategy use, the lack of complete background information on participants is made yet more vexing; where some studies rely on such small subject pools and do not account for various factors that have been shown to have a relationship with listening strategy use, how can the variable be isolated in order to come to a firm conclusion that factor X is what is truly related to strategy use as opposed to factor Y?

With all of these background-related issues in mind, it appears as though future research in the field of strategy usage should endeavor to include more background information about its subjects in order to provide a more complete picture of the interaction between language learners and the strategies they employ. Additionally, given the relatively new area of web-based Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), it may be beneficial to explore more deeply the kind of listening strategies that students use in these alternative, technology-rich settings that are becoming more common in

language classrooms at all levels around the world. Of significant interest would be the impact of CALL upon the types of metacognitive, cognitive, and even social strategies that language learners employ in a virtual setting.

Much of the strategy research reviewed here concludes with a call for explicit (listening) strategy instruction to be included in classroom activities and syllabi in general. The details of this, however, remain unclear in these current works of research. From a practical standpoint, this appears to be the next great step that must take place-- translation of such research into tangible, implementable elements of coursebooks, lesson plans, and homework, such that each and every language learner has the opportunity to experience a variety of learning strategies, hone their strategy usage, and apply these techniques both inside the classroom and out.

2.3.2 The Explicit Teaching of Listening Strategies

Beyond simply describing the strategies that learners employ in the classroom, many researchers have also explored the efficacy and potential benefits of incorporating listening strategy instruction into foreign language classrooms. Field (2008) describes a spectrum ranging from simply raising student awareness of the various strategies available to them to a more hands-on approach where students practice using the strategies actively (pp. 308-9). Thompson and Rubin (1996) speak to the value of the latter approach, reporting that students who received training in cognitive and metacognitive strategies performed better than their untrained peers on a test measuring listening comprehension. Nakatani (2010) also provided a group of EFL students with training in oral communication strategy use, including listening strategies, and found that

those students scored higher than students in the control group on an EFL posttest, and also that they showed more clear awareness of their own strategy use in filling communication gaps and negotiating meaning.

Among those scholars who espouse the benefits of teaching listening strategies, there is a distinction between those who advocate for the direct or explicit teaching of strategies versus those who prefer embedded or implicit strategy instruction. When strategies are directly taught, the goals and purpose of strategy instruction are entirely transparent to the learner, whereas in embedded instruction, the instructional materials guide learners and elicit the use of particular target strategies without explaining so to the learners. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) favor the former, citing several studies that found embedded instruction to be ineffective in providing learners with strategies that were easily transferrable to other contexts (pp. 153-4). Although they do admit that a major benefit of embedded strategy instruction is that having such materials available reduces the need for teacher training (*ibid.*) and thus removes some of the onus upon the teacher, these considerations are outweighed by the benefits that direct instruction offers to learners. This is not to say that there is no place in the foreign language curriculum for the embedded instruction of strategies, however it appears as though strategy instruction is most effective when at least a portion of it is done directly. Such direct instruction serves not only to raise learner awareness of the strategic resources available to them, but also to aid learners in understanding which strategies to deploy in which contexts.

Despite the apparent benefits of strategy instruction and use, Field (2008) raises several important considerations that complicate the matter of strategy instruction.

Firstly, learners differ in the degree to which they are receptive to strategy instruction or are able to employ strategies successfully in the language classroom. Each learner will naturally approach a listening text with a particular combination of confidence (or lack thereof) and processing capabilities that may either help or hinder him or her during the listening process (ibid., pp. 292-293), and these two factors play an important role in the success or failure of listening, regardless of strategy use. Secondly, strategy instruction costs precious classroom time, and is therefore not always practically possible to incorporate regularly (ibid., p. 310). Additionally, if strategy instruction is to be undertaken, language program directors or instructors must make decisions about which particular strategies to incorporate into their program's pedagogy and to what degree, despite the lack of expert agreement upon taxonomies of strategies (ibid.). Clearly, then, the issue of strategy instruction is not without its challenges; however, the apparent benefits that strategy instruction has been demonstrated to provide to learners cannot be ignored and provide strong evidence in favor of the direct teaching of strategies.

2.4 CONCLUSION

This literature review has sought to highlight the main trends in recent scholarship in listening and learning strategies. The historical status of listening was examined, along with the varying roles that it played in foreign language classrooms influenced by evolving pedagogies. The top-down, bottom-up, and interactive models of listening were also discussed. Turning to learning strategies, the chapter then explored the two most influential classifications of learning strategies by O'Malley & Chamot and Oxford, as well as alternative interpretations. Finally, a review of listening strategy research was

presented, along with factors that a language teacher must consider when contemplating direct strategy instruction.

Several issues in the field were also discussed over the course of this chapter. One issue is the lack of a unified system for the classification of learning strategies, which makes comparing strategy research that follows different systems problematic. Another challenge that strategy researchers face is providing complete background information about their participants, as strategy use has been independently shown to be related to myriad variables.

Moving away from the theoretical, the third chapter now turns to an example of strategy instruction in coursebooks used at a collegiate Arabic as a foreign language program.

Chapter 3: Listening Strategy Instruction in the Al-Kitaab Arabic Textbook Series and its Use in Teaching Arabic at the University of Texas at Austin

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The Department of Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Texas at Austin offers a core Arabic curriculum consisting of three years of study, in addition to upper-level content courses that may be selected freely by students after completing their third year of study. The first-, second-, and third-year core courses are all taught in an intensive format; each semester is worth 6 university credits, there are six contact hours a week, and students are usually expected to spend about two hours each night on homework in any or all of the language skill areas. In terms of content and sequencing, the core courses (particularly the first two years) closely follow the widely used *Al-Kitaab* textbook series, including teaching in full both *fusha* (formal Arabic, also called Modern Standard Arabic or MSA) and *'aammiyyah* (colloquial Arabic) vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. Students in the program generally reach a level of proficiency between Novice High or Intermediate Low on the ACTFL scale by the end of their first year, Intermediate Mid to High by the end of their second year, and Advanced Low by the end of their third year.

3.2 LISTENING STRATEGY INSTRUCTION IN THE AL-KITAAB SERIES

Although the contents of the *Al-Kitaab* textbook series and online companion website certainly do not comprise the entirety of UT's Arabic curriculum, the *Al-Kitaab* series nevertheless plays a large role in determining the scope and sequence of the material to be covered at each level. This book series also serves an important purpose relevant to the present research: building students' strategic skills in listening in Arabic

through direct instruction. While each individual language teacher's approach to strategy instruction may differ, the book series provides all students with a uniform strategic foundation. On top of this, the instruction provided in the textbook series may be the only strategy instruction that students receive in Arabic, thereby rendering the contents of *Al-Kitaab* all the more crucial to learners. An examination of the listening lessons in *Alif baa*, *Al-Kitaab I*, and *Al-Kitaab II*, covered in the first two years of language instruction, sheds light upon the strategies that the series works to instill within students. What follows is a discussion of the presentation of listening strategies in the *Al-Kitaab* series, along with potential areas for expanded strategy instruction in the classroom.

The third edition of *Alif baa* (Brustad, Al-Batal, & Al-Tūnisī, 2010), the first book in the *Al-Kitaab* series, assumes no prior knowledge of or exposure to Arabic, and also takes upon the role of introducing listening strategies to students. Beginning with the first lesson, the textbook authors explain the way they feel students should approach the textbook's accompanying audiovisual materials while also giving a clear rationale for their approach and outlining steps for listening:

You will find instructions for steps to take as you listen to these dialogues, and these steps are meant to help you reactivate and exploit the same listening strategies you used subconsciously to learn your native language. Each time you listen, you will get more out of the dialogue, especially if you set some specific goals and expectations for each "listen" ("listen," as usual, here is meant as a step; you will find it helpful to listen more than once at each stage, especially in the beginning). The final listen should

take place after you have understood all you can, and it is the “activation” listen, in which you pay attention not to what is being said (because you presumably already know that), but rather on how it is being said, in pronunciation, vocabulary, and structure....

1. Before listening, ask yourself, “What do I expect to hear?”
2. First listen: listen to see if your expectations are met. What do you hear?
3. Second listen: Which greetings do you recognize?
4. Third listen: What kinds of information do the speakers give? How do they express it, and what do you notice about the phrasing?
5. Fourth listen: Activate some of what you learned by introducing yourself to some of your classmates. (p. 16)

From this student-directed explanation, several key points emerge. First of all, the authors demonstrate to students the relevance and value of listening strategy use, making reference to the fact that strategies are employed consistently during first language acquisition. This also establishes students as experienced, successful strategy users, meaning that their strategic interaction with Arabic listening texts is, in actuality, a new application of a familiar skill set, rather than an entirely foreign concept. Secondly, the steps provided for approaching listening reflect an initial top-down approach, with each step encouraging the students to focus more closely on the text with each instance of listening. The pre-listening step leads students to activate schema relevant to the topic at hand by making predictions, and the first listen step asks them only to check the validity of these predictions and also asks broadly “What do you hear?”. This enables students to

consciously or subconsciously adopt a top-down or bottom-up approach, as they may focus on generalized statements about the topic at hand, or alternatively hone in on particular phonological or grammatical features of the text. In the third listen, the authors guide the students to approach the text in a bottom-up fashion, asking them to focus on structural specifics of the text. The final step introduces an opportunity for socio-affective strategy use, asking students to produce target forms together and, ideally, give each other constructive feedback. This introduction to listening strategy use seeks to provide students new to the Arabic language with the strategic foundations that they need in order to approach any listening text.

For the remainder of the textbook, the authors provide directions for each instance of listening to a new text, an activity which often takes place outside of the classroom. In the first listen, students are asked to respond generally to questions about the situation they are witnessing in the video and what the characters are doing. In the second listen, the authors ask students to focus on new target vocabulary and structures, as well as upon any familiar material that they may identify. Before the third listen, students are asked to formulate their own questions about what parts of the text they want to focus on and understand more fully. After listening for the third time, students may attempt to answer these questions, as well as identify any novel words or constructions and attempt to guess their meaning from context or grammatical clues. Finally, in class, students may listen for a final time in order to clear up any remaining issues and in order to then activate the vocabulary in class (*ibid.*, p. 44).

Students generally begin using the next book in the series, the third edition of *Al-Kitaab I* (Brustad, Al-Batal, & Al-Tūnisī, 2011), several weeks into their first semester of Arabic, and usually complete chapters 1-5 during the remainder of the first semester. The second semester of the first year course, then, covers chapters 6-11 of the book. *Al-Kitaab*'s first chapter reminds students of the steps discussed above, condensing them into three steps that become the basis of how students are expected to approach listening both in class and in completing their homework:

First listen: what is being said in general? Get the main topics and ideas, and formulate questions about specific information or expressions for stage two.

Second listen: What specific information can I get out of this text? Focus on answering your questions and finding specific information.

Third listen: How are ideas being expressed? Focus on close listening to details of language use, including focusing on pronunciation and structure.

(p. 5)

After this point, continued strategy use is left to the student, with directions for subsequent listening activities instructing students to “Us[e] the listening strategies you have learned” (p. 24) in order to understand main ideas, details, and to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words.

Students in their second year of Arabic at the University of Texas at Austin complete the remaining two chapters of *Al-Kitaab I* and then generally continue on to cover through the eighth chapter of the next book, the third edition of *Al-Kitaab II*

(Brustad, Al-Batal, & Al-Tūnisī, 2013). In this volume, the authors assume that students are capable of following the aforementioned strategic steps without guidance, and remind them of this process only once in the first lesson:

At home, you will listen for general meaning, answer questions in writing, and prepare to discuss what you have seen with a partner in class. In class, you will first talk with your partner about what you understood at home, then watch the video again and answer a new set of questions. If the video is in spoken Arabic, you may perform a role play activity. (p. 52)

By this point in the curriculum, then, students are expected to be comfortable deploying the metacognitive strategies of schema activation and a top-down focus on main ideas, the cognitive strategy of adopting a bottom-up approach to analyzing unfamiliar words and structures, and the socio-affective strategy of conferring with peers to test hypotheses about what was heard and how that may be extended and elaborated upon.

3.3 CONCLUSION

In this way, the first three books in the *Al-Kitaab* textbook series place a strong emphasis on the importance of listening strategy use on the part of students and work to train students to follow the strategic steps outlined here. Although the strategy instruction presented in the textbooks is significant, there are two areas that merit closer examination. First of all, because the textbook series adheres to the aforementioned listening procedures so closely, there is a possibility that alternative strategies not covered in these procedures may go unnoticed, undiscussed, or unexploited in the classroom. For example, novice learners or students discouraged by a particularly

difficult listening text may benefit from learning about and deploying socio-affective strategies such as preparing mentally by relaxing and setting realistic goals for understanding a listening text. The implication of this is that further strategy instruction could potentially be incorporated into listening lessons, especially once students have begun making significant progress in *Al-Kitaab I* and have reached a level of comfort and familiarity with the main strategies presented in the textbook. Secondly, language teachers who use the *Al-Kitaab* series may themselves have varying levels of comfort and experience with regard to listening strategy instruction. Because of teacher individual differences, then, the actual treatment given to listening strategies may vary widely from classroom to classroom and from institution to institution. Even as novice teachers gain familiarity and experience with supplementing textbooks with external reading and listening materials, they may still feel unsure as to how to incorporate further strategy instruction into their classrooms as well. In an attempt to address these issues, the following chapter sets out a model to aid teachers in selecting appropriate listening strategies to teach various listening tasks.

Chapter 4: Classification of Strategies Based on Listening Task Type

4.1 KINDS OF LISTENING TASKS

The traditional strategy classifications of metacognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective have led to the production of an impressive body of strategy research; however, these categories are perhaps not transparent enough to be easily accessible to students, and could even cause confusion for language teachers themselves. At the source of this confusion is the fact that this traditional classification seeks to group strategies based upon students' invisible mental processes.

An alternative approach to listening strategy classification is to base strategy categories not upon the cognitive processes of language learners, but instead upon the nature of the task type. ACTFL (2012a) defines three modes of communication: interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational (p. 7), the former two of which are relevant for purposes of listening strategy classification. Interpersonal communication, usually manifested in conversations, is characterized by “active negotiation of meaning among individuals [where] participants observe and monitor one another to see how their meanings and intentions are being communicated [and where] adjustments and clarifications are made accordingly (ibid.). By contrast, interpretive communication, often associated with listening to speeches, messages, or songs, is characterized by “interpretation of what the author, speaker, or producer wants the receiver of the message to understand [and] one-way communication with no recourse to the active negotiation of meaning with the writer, speaker, or producer” (ibid.) This type of listening in particular also requires students to go beyond the surface meaning of the text and draw upon

cultural perspectives and background knowledge. This type of listening is what most commonly occurs in foreign language classrooms. It is clear, then, that when students of a foreign language listen in a real world setting, the behavior expected or required of them may vary greatly depending on the nature of the listening material; despite this, approaches to strategy instruction often work on developing a specific set of listening strategies, regardless of task type. Ideally, the nature of students' interaction with a listening text should be determined by what is most authentic; that is to say, students should be asked to engage in strategic behavior that is as similar as possible to the actual strategic behavior they would use in a similar, real-world situation. ACTFL's interpersonal-interpretive classification of communicative behavior provides a potential solution to the problematic traditional classifications of strategies that do not regard task type, and may serve as an effective framework for the organization of listening strategies in particular.

What follows is an attempt to classify learning strategies based upon both listening task type along with the proficiency level of students. The strategies listed in the tables presented here are adapted from ACTFL (2012a), Field (2008), Flowerdew and Miller (2005), and O'Malley and Chamot (1990). Following the tables is a discussion and rationale for their organization.

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Novice | Prepare mentally for listening by relaxing, developing a positive attitude, setting realistic expectations, and monitoring emotions |
| | Rehearse by anticipating what the speaker might say |
| | Imitate or repeat modeled words |
| | Indicate lack of understanding |
| | Ask speaker for repetition or clarification |
| | Accept an incomplete understanding of a word, phrase, or entire message |
| | Make a mental summary or translation of what was heard |
| | Predict meaning based on tone of voice or stress patterns |
| Intermediate | |

Table 1: Strategies for Interpersonal Listening

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Novice | Monitor own comprehension |
| | Rely upon visual support (e.g. pictures, videos, body language) |
| | Rely upon recognition of cognates |
| | Predict meaning based on context, prior knowledge, or experience |
| | Pay attention only to the main idea of the text rather than the details |
| | Pay attention only to specific aspects of the text rather than the whole |
| | Prepare a list of questions about the topic before listening |
| | Identify an unclear portion of a text for further investigation |
| | Make a written summary, notes, or translation of what was heard |
| | Rely upon recognition of word roots and patterns |
| Intermediate | Rely upon grammatical analysis of portions of the text |

Table 2: Strategies for Interpretive Listening

4.2 DISCUSSION

There are three important points that should be taken into consideration regarding this classification of listening strategies. First of all, the boundary between interpersonal and interpretive communication may be quite fluid, both inside and outside of the foreign language classroom. It is rare that individuals communicate interpersonally without some

degree of interpretation of speaker meaning. Similarly, especially within the context of a communicative language classroom that relies heavily upon peer and group work, it is rare that students would listen in a purely interpretive fashion without any ability to ask for help or clarification from their peers or instructor. The lack of a firm distinction between metacognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective strategies, as has been discussed here, represents a significant challenge to the traditional strategy classification models. Here, however, the goal is not to prescribe how students must necessarily interact with a text, nor to describe their mental processes, but rather to suggest a range of possible, appropriate approaches based upon what linguistic functions students could ostensibly be expected to perform outside of the classroom. The lack of firm distinctions between strategy types that plagued the traditional models may in fact be beneficial in this context; depending on an instructor's particular goals for students and how they interact with a text, that instructor may select strategies when designing a listening lesson that guide students to treat the text in either an interpersonal or interpretive fashion. For example, many introductory textbooks (including the *Al-Kitaab* series) include video materials of dialogues between native speakers. Depending on the instructor's vision for that particular lesson, unit, and course, such materials may be approached with either interpersonal or interpretive listening strategies. If the focus were on interpersonal strategies, the instructor may, for example, ask students to listen to only one participant's half of the conversation, line by line, and then ask them to plan how they would respond to each new piece of linguistic information, including asking for clarification, for example, if necessary. If approaching a similar text with the goal of interpretive

communication in mind, on the other hand, the instructor may for instance discuss the subject of the video briefly with the class and then ask students to brainstorm questions that they have about the topic or that they believe will be answered during the course of the listening.

Secondly, although the strategies are divided broadly into novice and intermediate levels, that is not to say that an intermediate-level learner would not benefit from repeating a new word aloud, or that a novice learner would not benefit from a deeper grammatical analysis of an utterance or a portion thereof. Just as students gain proficiency in a foreign language from repeated usage of vocabulary and grammatical structures, so too do they gain comfort with and expertise in strategy use over the course of repeated applications in various contexts and with varied textual material.

Finally, this model is not meant in any way to supplant the strategy instruction already in place in any Arabic program; rather, this model seeks to expand upon any program's existing strategic foundation and also provide instructors with a clear, concise tool to aid them in incorporating further strategy instruction into their classrooms as they see fit.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

5.1 IMPLICATIONS

Ideally, instructors of any foreign language will be able to use this model as an aid in envisioning how listening strategy instruction may be introduced at first into individual listening lessons, then built upon gradually throughout the semester over the course of several chapters of material, and potentially even made a part of the program's expected learning outcomes for students by being incorporated into the syllabi of first- and second-year courses. Speaking to the importance of this third point, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) discuss how foreign language students have been found not to value strategic training that was not closely linked to the language learning objectives of the course (p. 162). Transparency in explaining the value of listening strategy instruction, then, is of prime importance if language instructors expect students to continue to be motivated to engage in strategic behavior. Because the model presented in this report seeks specifically to aid instructors in pairing listening tasks with a range of strategies that are directly applicable to real life interactions, it may be an appropriate means of ensuring that students see the benefit of utilizing the strategies that they are learning.

Another implication of this review is the importance of providing professional development opportunities in strategy instruction to language teachers, a thread that emerged numerous times in the strategy literature. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) argue that "there is a need not only to train teachers in methods of incorporating strategy instruction in their classrooms but also to convince teachers that learning strategies can be effective for their students" (p. 155). While it is likely that teachers' attitudes and

receptiveness toward learning strategy instruction have changed in the quarter-century since the time of their writing, the authors raise a valid point, and it may well be the case today that many teachers would like to incorporate strategy instruction into their classrooms but feel untrained or otherwise unprepared to do so. To a certain degree, enabling teachers to incorporate strategy instruction into their classrooms may be as simple as raising the teachers' awareness of the opportunities before them; most of what a teacher does inside of the classroom may be strategic, and becoming aware of how and when to employ strategies with students will be of immense benefit.

Calls for teacher professional development opportunities do not end at strategy instruction alone; many researchers have pointed out a need for professional development in the field of foreign language materials design and adaptation as a whole. Wagner (2014) describes how many commercial textbook authors exhibit a “reliance on intuition rather than spoken corpora, a bias toward linguistic rather than sociolinguistic rules, and a lack of appropriate pragmatic models” (p. 296). The status quo of foreign language textbook publishing, therefore, almost necessitates the development and/or adaptation of external, authentic listening materials, along with appropriate strategies to help the students approach these texts. The tasks of materials development and adaptation are not insignificant ones, and require that ample guidance be provided to the language instructor if he or she is not already familiar with these processes. Tomlinson (2012) also points to the fact that language instructors, now more than ever, appear developmentally ready to turn a critical eye to the instructional materials they are expected to use:

Teachers also seem to be more constructively critical of their coursebooks and to be more willing, confident and able to localise and personalise their coursebooks for their learners. This is especially so in regions where teachers have been trained as materials developers, either on teacher development courses or on national or institutional materials development projects. As Canniveng & Martinez (2003), Lyons (2003), Popovici & Bolitho (2003), Tomlinson (2003d) and Bolitho (2008) have told us, such courses and projects are ideal for stimulating teachers to think about how best to facilitate language acquisition and development, to gain self-esteem and confidence and to develop personally and professionally in ways which help them to help others. (p. 170)

Given that many language instructors have already independently identified the need for listening materials development and adaptation, coupled with the professional and personal benefits of engaging in materials development and sharing these accomplishments, it appears to be an opportune moment for language program coordinators to seek to provide professional development opportunities that would train instructors in these processes as well as in how to facilitate students' accessing these materials by using appropriate learning strategies. Indeed, one may even argue that it is the program coordinator's responsibility to ensure that instructors are comfortable with these processes, given the immense role that materials play in the language classroom. Wyatt (2011) argues that instructor-led materials development and adaptation "allows teachers to respond to the geographical and cultural context of the learners, draw upon

the topical in referring to current events, and provide a personal touch” (p. 2/28). This all sheds light upon how providing professional development opportunities in materials development will potentially allow for language instructors to connect with their students in a deeper, more meaningful fashion. Equally crucially, such professional development opportunities may empower language instructors to design and adapt materials that strengthen not only the learner’s linguistic abilities, but their strategic abilities as well.

5.2 LIMITATIONS

The goal of this report has been to present a theoretical basis for selecting appropriate listening strategies based on the listening task and what students may realistically be expected to do in similar situations. As this research did not include an application of the proposed model and analysis of its effectiveness over the course of a semester or more, there is still a need for an evaluation of this model for strategy classification in a classroom setting.

5.3 FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Aside from the aforementioned necessity of applying and testing this model in a classroom setting, there are myriad directions that the future of strategy instruction research may take. As mentioned earlier, the field would greatly benefit from further research into listening strategy usage among students, especially as related to gender, proficiency level, and affective factors. There may also be merit in conducting additional longitudinal studies that track how students’ preferred listening strategies develop over the course of their foreign language study, as well as to determine to what degree strategies should be revisited or retaught in the classroom. Finally, foreign language

teachers and strategy researchers alike may find use in an actual attempt or even a theoretical model of how strategy instruction may be incorporated at a programmatic level over the course of several years of language instruction.

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