

# The Effect of Personality on the English as Foreign Language Learners' Performance on Listening Comprehension: Extroverts vs. Introverts

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Received: 11 Jun 2012; Accepted: 27 Aug 2012; Published: 15 Sep 2012

## ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between affective variables and listening strategies. The main objective is to investigate the relationship between extroversion/introversion personality variables and the English as Foreign Language learners' performance on listening strategies. The study was conducted on a group of 140 male and female Iranian EFL learners from two different Azad University, i.e. Tehran-South and Roudehen who participated and answered a Nelson proficiency test. 40 homogeneous subjects chosen from each university responded to Eysenck Personality Questionnaire and based on the result of this questionnaire, the subjects were divided into extroverts and introverts. IELTS listening comprehension test as the final exam of for their course was developed to elicit the listening scores of each group. Finally, to observe whether or not there is any significant difference between the two groups in term of listening, the collected data was put in SPSS 18 and the results showed that Extroversion/Introversion personality trait has significant effect on the EFL learners' listening, i.e. Extroverts' perform better than Introverts.

**Key words:** Introverts, Extroverts, Listening Strategies

## INTRODUCTION

Listening is an important part of foreign language learning process, and it has also been defined as an active process during which listeners construct meaning from oral input. Listening skill developed faster than the other three skills and could affect reading and writing abilities in learning a new language (Vandergrift, 1997). Listening comprehension means the process of understanding speech in a second or foreign language. It is the perception of information and stimuli received through the ears. For foreign language learners, it may easily cause confusion and misunderstanding if they cannot comprehend what people intend to express.

The significance of this study might be easier to justify if we accept the claim that not all types of personality are equally successful in achieving their academic goals in an educational system. Moreover, as a persons' personality whether its extrovert or introvert is partly formed as the result of environmental influences, it can be concluded that the effect of personality on achievement needs to be reexamined in each cultural setting.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the relationship between personality (introversion-extroversion) and foreign language learning. It aims to show that the reflections of different personality types can be observed in students' developing appropriate learning styles for themselves. Thus, personality seems to be a dominant factor in achieving the educational goals for the students learning a foreign language. That is to say, these traced personality characteristics can also be an indication of which learning styles these learners can improve and to what extent they can provide success in foreign language achievement.

### Background of the Study

The most researched personality aspect in language studies has been the extroversion-introversion dimension, which is understandable, because this trait is fundamental to a number of personality theories, from the

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) to Eysenck's model and the Big Five construct. Furthermore, as Furnham (1990) points out, it is relatively easy to produce a reliable measure of this trait and there are also several obvious commonsense relationships between extroversion and language use. Yet, the emerging picture about the role of extroversion-introversion in SLA has been rather negative; with scholars either concluding that the relationship between this trait and learning was insignificant or mixed. Dewaele and Furnham (1990) argued that this bad reputation is partly due to not distinguishing properly between written and oral language criteria and in studies where extroversion scores are correlated with linguistic variables extracted from complex verbal tasks (i.e. conversation), a clear pattern emerges: Extroverts are found to be more fluent than introverts both in L1 and L2 and particularly in formal situations or in environments characterized by interpersonal stress. Dewaele (2004) also found that extroverted L2 speakers tended to use colloquial words freely whereas introverts tended to avoid them.

In the area of SLA, some researchers have traditionally claimed that extroverts are better language learners (Van Daele et al., 2006) because of their willingness to speak out and their greater desire to communicate, which help to increase the amount of input and comprehensible language output (Krashen, 1985; Swain 1993). Also, there is a belief, among many classroom teachers, that extroverts have superior L2 communicative ability and are more successful as second or foreign language learners (Lightbown and Spada, 1993). This ease at oral communication may positively affect the attitudes of extroverts towards target languages (Dewaele, 2005), which facilitates their second or foreign language learning. The study by Macintyre and Charos (1996) of the impacts of personality traits on frequency of communication in an L2 revealed significant negative correlations between extroversion and language anxiety, suggesting that extroverts communicated more in French as an L2 than introverts. With regard to the type of learning strategies, Wakamoto (2000) found that extroversion significantly correlated with functional practice strategies, where the focus of practice is on actual language use and not on grammatical form or accuracy. Based on a review of the literature on extroversion and L2 learning, Ellis (1994), however, concludes that extroverted learners do better in acquiring basic interpersonal communication skills and introverted learners do better at developing cognitive academic language ability.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Participants**

Around 70 students (males and females) from each of Roudehen Azad University and Tehran Jonoub Azad University majoring in English Language Teaching in their 4<sup>th</sup> semester of 2012/ 2013 (1390-91) were the participants that their ages ranged from 19 to 25. Reasons behind picking this population are due to people's opinion that all students from this department should have good achievement in acquiring English skill as foreign language, at least better than ones who are not in this department. It should also be mentioned that as Azad universities are not governmental ones and tuition is needed for each semester, students who enroll in such universities are somehow socioeconomically equivalent. Due to the large number of the population, it will be ineffective to collect data from all of them. That is why choosing a part (sample) of them is considered operational to represent others. The more sample taken from the population the more valid the result of the research are expected to be. Therefore, sample in this research is initially expected to be 40 students from each university. The forty students are chosen randomly (Random Sampling Technique) in the purpose to make this research as representatively as it can since everyone share similar chance to be sample.

### **Instruments**

Three data gathering instruments were used in the study: Nelson English Language Test, the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire – Revised Version (EPQ-R) and IELTS listening comprehension test. A 50-item English Language Test from upper intermediate section of the Nelson English Language Test Series was administered in this research to assess the participants' language proficiency level. The allocated time for this test was 35 minutes.

The EPQ-R is one of the most recent versions of the personality tests devised by Eysenck et al., (1998). This version of the test, which was developed by Eysenck and Eysenck (1991), measures three dimensions of personality: P – Psychoticism or Tough-Mindedness, E – Extraversion, N – Neuroticism or Emotionality. It also includes a fourth scale known as L – Lie, which aims to determine if the respondent has honestly completed the questionnaire, i.e. their degree of social desirability. The EPQ-R consists of yes-no questions in which the scales are mingled so that the respondent cannot easily detect what aspects of personality are being measured. Further, the respondents are told not to think too long about the meaning of each question and that there is no right/wrong answer or trick questions (Eysenck and Eysenck, 1991). No time limit is set, but it usually takes between 10 to 15 minutes to complete the test. International English Language Testing System is an international standardized of English language proficiency. It is jointly managed by University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations, the British Council and IDP Education Pty Ltd, and was established in 1989.

## Procedure

A 50-item English Language Test from upper intermediate section of the Nelson English Language Test Series was administered to each group including 70 students (males and females) from each university to assess the participants' language proficiency level. The allocated time for this test was 35 minutes. After getting the result of such test 40 homogenous subjects were chosen to be under the study of this research. The EPQ-R is the next test which was administered. It included 36 online questions in <http://www.similarminds.com/eysenck.html>. After going to the English Language Laboratory of each university the 40 homogenous students sat behind computer. As they enter to the website they were supposed to select their sex and honestly respond to the questions in order to get result of the percentage of being Extrovert, Neuroticism and Psychoticism. Finally, IELTS listening comprehension test was administered to all learners, participated in this research, from Roudehen Azad University as their final exam and the same test applied for Tehran-Jonoub branch.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

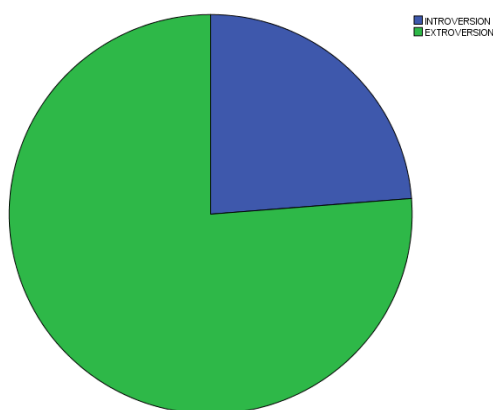
According to Eysenck, when someone is observed to be talkative and sociable (the so-called "extrovert") he or she can be described as "expressive". In contrast, people who are more quiet and private (the so-called "introvert") can be described as "reserved". In general, the Expressive are quick to speak and slow to listen, while the Reserved are quick to listen and slow to speak. Those who are more expressive appear more comfortable around groups of people than they are when alone. On the other hand, those who are more reserved seem to be more comfortable when alone than when in a crowd. Several studies have been carried out to investigate if E/I personality dimension plays any role in the process of language learning.

Listening comprehension has been a thorny concern for the EFL learners who seem to fail to cope with the listening tasks in most cases. Because weak listeners are not well aware of listening strategies, they mostly depend on their linguistic knowledge and merely resort to the metalinguistic knowledge and learning strategies. When they come across a new structure or unfamiliar vocabulary item, they give up pursuing the message of the passage. Also, they are often unable to process information quickly enough to make sense of what is said. This problem could be due to different factors including cognition and affect.

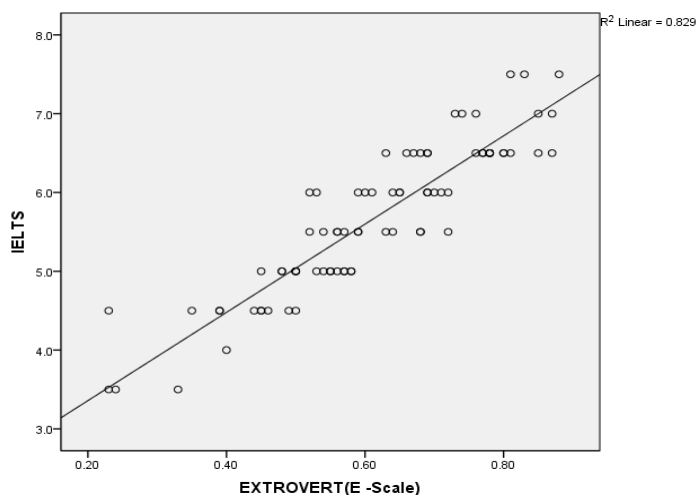
Table 1 and its corresponding graph (Graph 1) reveal frequency of subjects' introversion and Extroversion. Drawing on the information given there, 80% of subjects (64 learners) were found to be extrovert and 20% (16 learners) were marked as introverts. Moreover, table 2 depicts the descriptive statistical indices obtained for subjects' introversion and extroversion that the mean score was 61%, i.e. the expected score for a test taker from this test is approximately 61%. The lowest score was 23% which indicates the person was strongly introvert and the highest score was 88% which indicates the person was strongly extrovert.

**Table 1 - Extrovert / Introvert**

Item		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Extroversion	64	80.0	80.0	80.0
	Introversion	16	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	100.0	



**Graph 1. Extrovert/Introvert**



In order to explore the relationship between extraversion and English academic achievement, I correlated the scores learners obtained in the EPQ-R with those attained as end-of-semester grades in IELTS listening test. Graph 2 depicts the extroversion scores along with those of IELTS score. Hence, only 80 learners were considered for the correlational analysis, i.e., students who were studying in 4<sup>th</sup> semester of university. The minimum English grade (IELTS listening score) was 3.5 and the maximum 7.5. Standard Deviation (SD) was 94, indicating that dispersion of the scores was low. The drawn regression line in this plot has the least square error. This line has the least errors and deviations among all possible lines. The positive slope indicates that as much as the percentage of individual's extrovert rises the listening score rises as well. Its steep slope indicates that as the percentage of extrovert changes a bit, a big change occurs in English listening comprehension. The table 2 investigates that this line is suitable model for these two variables.

Model		Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.542	1	1.542	377.622	0.0001 <sup>a</sup>
	Residual	.318	78	0.004		
	Total	1.860	79			

### CONCLUSION

Regarding extroversion and language outcomes, it can be observed that there are significant differences between introverts and extraverts in their performance on the Listening Comprehension. Therefore, it can be suggested that performance on the listening is a function of whether learners are introverts or extraverts. When considering extroversion and end-of-semester English grades (IELTS listening test), it can be concluded that extroverts did significantly better than introverts on English achievement grades.

In order to appraise the relationship between introversion and extroversion and the listening ability of EFL university learners, Pearson Correlation Coefficient was run. As the results shown in table 3, the high coefficient of correlation offers that there's variety between extroverts and introverts in their listening comprehension score and this points to the existence of a statistically significant correlation between the two variables in question. Indeed, based on the upshots, extrovert subjects were characterized by a better performance on listening ability compared to introvert subjects.

Item		EXTROVERT (E-Scale)	IELTS
EXTROVERT (E-Scale)	Pearson Correlation	1	.910**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	80	80
IELTS	Pearson Correlation	.910**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	80	80

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

### Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Seyed Mahdi Araghi whose unconditional guidance, teaching, and support made this dissertation possible. Also, I would like to thank Dr. Asadollah Fam for his useful comments and suggestions during this research. I am also grateful to Dr. Hamidreza Fatemipour for his support in both universities of Tehran-Jonoub and Roudheh.

Furthermore, I wish to extend my appreciation to the students who participated in my dissertation and also my family for their encouragement all through my studies at Maragheh University.

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### List of Abbreviation

ANOVA .....	Analysis of Variance
DF .....	Degree of Freedom
E .....	Extrovert/ Extroversion
EFL .....	English as Foreign Language
EPQ .....	Eysenck Personality Questionnaire
EPP .....	Eysenck Personality Profiler
EPQ-R .....	Eysenck Personality Questionnaire – Revised
I .....	Introvert/ Introversion
ID .....	Individual Difference
IELTS .....	International English Language Testing System
L2 .....	Second Language
MBIT .....	Myers-Briggs Type Indicator
SD .....	Standard Deviation
SLA .....	Second Language Acquisition
SPSS .....	Statistical Package for Social Sciences