

Tolerance of Ambiguity in Relation to Listening Performance across Learners of Various Linguistic Backgrounds

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Abstract : Foreign language learning is not straightforward and can be affected by numerous factors, among which personality features like tolerance of ambiguity (TA) are so well-known and important. Such characteristics yet can be affected by other factors like learning additional languages. The current investigation, thus, opted to explore the possible effect of linguistic background (being bilingual or trilingual) on the tolerance of ambiguity (TA) of Iranian EFL learners. Furthermore, the possible mediating effect of TA on multilingual learners' language performance (listening comprehension in this study) was expounded. This research involved 68 EFL learners (32 bilinguals, 29 trilinguals) with the age range of 19-29 doing their degrees in the Department of English Language and Literature of Urmia University. A set of questionnaires, including tolerance of ambiguity (Herman et. al., 2010) and linguistic background information (Modirkhameneh, 2005), as well as the IELTS listening comprehension test, were used for data collection purposes. The results of a set of independent samples t-test and mediation analysis (Hayes, 2022) showed that (1) linguistic background (being bilingual or trilingual) had a significant direct effect on EFL learners' TA, (2) Linguistic background had a significant direct influence on listening comprehension, (3) TA had a substantial direct influence on listening comprehension, and (4) TA moderated the influence of linguistic background on listening comprehension considerably. These results suggest that multilingualism may be considered as an advantageous asset for EFL learners and should be a prioritized characteristic in EFL instruction in multilingual contexts. Further pedagogical implications and suggestions for research are proposed in light of effective EFL instruction in multilingual contexts.

Keywords : tolerance of ambiguity, listening comprehension, multilingualism, bilingual, trilingual

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