

The Egyptian Expansion in the Near East in the Saite Period

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Abstract

The Saite foreign policy in the Near East in the seventh and sixth centuries BC is revisited, the Saite expansion into the region is re-considered, and the existence of Egyptian empire and the nature of Egypt's presence at the time and interests in the region are discussed.

Keywords: Saite; Psamtik; Nekau; Apries; Amasis; Levant; Nubia; Cyprus; Egyptians; Assyrians; Babylonians; Persians; Trade; Diplomacy; Warfare.

المخلص العربي

تعالج هذه الورقة البحثية السياسة الخارجية في العصر الصاوي، عصر ملوك الأسرة السادسة والعشرين، في منطقة الشرق الأدنى القديم في القرنين السابع والسادس قبل الميلاد، خصوصًا ما يعرف بـ«التوسع الصاوي» في المنطقة. وتناقش أيضًا فرضية وجود امبراطورية مصرية وطبيعة وجود مصر واهتماماتها في ذلك الوقت في الشرق الأدنى القديم.

الكلمات الدالة: العصر الصاوي؛ بسامتيك؛ نكاو؛ أبريس؛ أمازيس؛ الشرق الأدنى؛ النوبة؛ قبرص؛ المصريون؛ الآشوريون؛ البابليون؛ الفرس؛ التجارة؛ الدبلوماسية؛ الحرب.

Introduction

The Saite foreign policy is well documented in Egyptian, biblical, Assyrian, Babylonian and Classical resources. We use these primary resources to reconstruct the history of the region in the period. While some scholars suggest that Egypt established an empire in the Levant in the Saite Period, this article demonstrates that after the end of the Egyptian empire in the Levant by the Late New Kingdom in ca. 1085 BC, then a gap before the Saite kings started to set up points of interest and influence in the region to renew Egypt's trade interests in South West Asia and keep the Assyrian vassal state system in the Levant under Egyptian control in the face of the Babylonian ambitions in the region.

Assyria Invading Egypt

The Ancient Near East in the first millennium until the late seventh century BC was dominated by Assyria. This imperial state continued to expand its control over a vast region from Iran in the east to Syria-Palestine in the west and Anatolia in the north to Egypt in

the south; and until it succeeded to establish a unified empire: Neo-Assyrian Empire (ca. 934-609 BC).⁽¹⁾ Egypt was an appealing target for the Neo-Assyrians because of its great wealth and its continuous support of Syro-Palestine rebels against Assyrian rule from the ninth century BC. The Kushite Twenty-fifth Dynasty had conquered Egypt in the mid-eight century BC and retained control until 664 BC. After consolidating his hold over southern Palestine, the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (ca. 680-669 BC) organized three campaigns to invade Egypt and he finally defeated the Kushite king Taharqo (Assyrian: Tarqû) (ca. 690-664 BC) and conquered the central capital of Egypt in the north, Memphis in 664. In order to maintain control over this remote country, Esarhaddon created a system of loyal vassals among a number of local dynasts of the Egyptian Nile Delta. Regarding this, his son and successor, Assurbanipal later in year wrote:

“...the people of Assyria who were in Egypt, my servants, whom Esarhaddon king of Assyria, my father, had entrusted with kingship there. ... the kings and governors, my servants. ... the kings of Egypt, my servants ...

Nikkû, Sharru-lu-dari and Paqruru, the kings whom my father had established in Egypt, violated the oath of Assur and the great gods, my lords, and broke their word. They forgot the good my father had done to them and planned evil in their hearts. They spoke false words, and they counseled each other in a counterproductive way. “If they chase Tarqû out of Egypt, where shall we stay?” They sent their emissaries to swear an oath of peace, saying: “We want to establish peace and be in agreement amongst ourselves. We want to divide the land amongst ourselves. Let there be no lord among us.”

They repeatedly planned evil against the mass of the troops of Assyria, the strength of my rule. They plotted to take their lives, and endeavored to do unheard evils. My officials heard of these things and played a trick on them. They captured their messengers with their messages, and saw their treacherous doings. They captured Sharru-lu-dari and Nikkû, and shackled their hands and feet. The curse of Assur, king of the gods, came upon them, they who had sinned against

(1) M. Van de Mierop, *A History of the Ancient Near East. Ca. 3000-313 BC*, 2nd ed. (Malden, 2007), 229, 244.

their might oath. Those to whom I had done good deeds, I called to task. The people of the cities, all who had joined them and had plotted evil, great and small, they cut down with their weapons, and not a single person inside these cities was saved.

To him, whom they brought to me in [Nineveh], my royal city, I Assurbanipal, king of Assyria, the broad-minded, the well-doer who seeks goodness, to Nikkû, my servant, to whom had been entrusted the city Kar-Bel-Matati, I showed mercy, although he had sinned. I laid upon him a loyalty oath that was stricter than what existed before. I encouraged him, put bright garments on him, and gave him a golden hoe, the symbol of his kingship. I put golden rings on his fingers, and gave him an iron dagger with a sheath inlaid with gold on which I had written my name. Chariots, horses and mules I granted to him for his royal journeys. I sent to him my officials and governors to help him. I sent him back to Sais, which is now called Kar-Bel-Matati, where my father had made him king. I showed him kindness ever greater than my father had done.”⁽¹⁾

However, Assyrian control over Egypt was weak and by the death of Esarhaddon, Taharqo had reasserted Kushite rule over the whole of Egypt. Assurbanipal dispatched an ultimately successful campaign to regain control over Egypt, which was interrupted by a rebellion of the Delta dynasts. The Assyrian king defeated the rebels, with the assistance of an army from some Syro-Palestinian states including Judah, and he punished the vassals. Even so, he appointed one of them, Nekau (ca. 676-664 BC) (commonly Nekau I or Necho/Necho I Assyrian Nikkû), as king of Sais (Sau) in the central Delta and Mimpî (Memphis), and as head of the Saite house, and gave him special prominence among the Delta vassals. The Saite Period started when the Assyrian ended the Kushite rule of Egypt, and left Egypt due to the rise of Babylonia which made Assyria busy concentrating in Mesopotamia. When the Assyrian army left Egypt, the new Kushite king, Tanutamun (664-656 BC), turned northward and rees-

(1) English translation after Van de Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 257-58 [Document 13.1 Assurbanipal and Egypt. Excerpt from Assurbanipal's account written after 664], who bases his on H.-U. Onasch, *Die assyrischen Eroberungen Ägyptens* (Wiesbaden, 1994), 104-15.

established Kushite power at Thebes, Memphis, and Heliopolis, expelling pro-Assyrian elements from Memphis.⁽¹⁾ This move by Tanutamun forced Assurbanipal to conduct a final, revengeful major attack against Egypt in 664 and 663 BC.⁽²⁾ He reached the eternal capital of ancient Egypt in the south, Thebes (Assyrian: Ni'), and plundered it ending any Kushite hope of ruling Egypt forever. The Assyrian administrative system of ruling Egypt during the reigns of Esarhadon and Assurbanipal (663-655 BC) was based on controlling Egypt from their remote imperial capital in Nineveh by appointing native Egyptians, such as Nekau to serve as royal vassals, and then returning home to manage their own imperial affairs.⁽³⁾ However, the Assyrian system of loyal vassals in Egypt did not last for long.

Psamtik I Wahibre (664-610 BC): Founding the Saite Dynasty (664-526 BC)

The Saite Period, the Saite Renaissance, or the 26th Dynasty (664-525 BC), is often considered to be among the last glorious phases of ancient Egyptian history. After regaining its independence, unification, and centralization under native Egyptian Pharaohs during this period, Egypt started a glamorous era of renaissance. The Saite Pharaohs drew attention to the past of Egypt and put emphasis on the major golden periods of Egyptian civilization, such as the Old, Middle Kingdom, and New Kingdoms.⁽⁴⁾

Upon the death of Nekau, who was probably killed in battle with Tanutamun, his son Psamtik (Psamtik I) ascended the throne in Sais in the central Delta. He had been educated in Assyria and given the Assyrian name Nabu-shezzi-banni. Upon his return to Egypt, he was installed as ruler of the Delta town Hut-her-ib (Athribis).⁽⁵⁾ From be-

(1) A. Dodson, *Afterglow of Empire. Egypt from the Fall of the New Kingdom to the Saite Renaissance* (Cairo, 2012), 169.

(2) Van de Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 256.

(3) On the Assyrian administration and ideology of the empire, see Van de Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 258-60.

(4) On the Saite renaissance, see, for instance, Dodson, *Afterglow of Empire*, 169-80, 278-80.

(5) R.G. Morkot, *The A to Z of Ancient Egyptian Warfare* (Lanham, 2003), 173.

ing a loyal vassal to the Assyrians to be the sole and strong ruler of Egypt, Psamtik I completely succeeded to free Egyptian peacefully and gradually from the Assyrian occupation and led the country to a long period of renaissance and prosperity. In 664 BC Psamtik I first took over the whole of the Nile Delta through diplomatic relationships. Over time, Psamtik I gained enough strength to become independent and in 656 BC, he declared himself sole king over the entire country of Egypt, now independent under a native Egyptian pharaoh. It was not astonishing that Psamtik I ignored the reign of the last Kushite ruler Tanutamun and dated his reign from the death of the Kushite king Taharqo. Psamtik I probably used the traditional royal title 'King of Upper and Lower Egypt' in his regnal year 9 after he successfully secured his position and supremacy at Thebes by adopting his daughter, Neitiqerti (Nitocris/Nitokris),⁽¹⁾ by Amenirdis II, daughter of Taharqo, to be the future God's Wife of Amun,⁽²⁾ therefore he spread his power over Upper Egypt. Therefore, he gradually ruled and united Egypt. When Psamtik I, the true architect of the Saite Dynasty, founded this dynasty, Egypt enjoyed a long, prosperous, and strong period for around 140 years. For instance, the military texts of Psamtik I partially imitated the early New Kingdom models.⁽³⁾ In the seventh century BC, exactly after 608 BC, Assyria abandoned, as an imperial power the international scene, the Levant to have control over internal affairs at home and under the rising power of Babylonia which represented a major threat to the Assyrian heartland. Then Babylonia became a major player in the Levant to fill the political vacuum that was created when Assyria left the region. Moreover, Babylonia became a serious threat to Egyptian interests in the east, therefore, Egypt had to encounter the Babylonian ambitions in the

(1) See more on this, see R. A. Caminos, *The Nitocris Adoption Stela*, *JEA* 50 (1964), 71-101.

(2) T. G. H. James, *Egypt. The Twenty-Fifth and Twenty-Sixth Dynasties*, In J. Boardman, I. E. S. Edwards, E. Sollberger and N. G. L. Hammond (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. III, Part 2. *The Assyrian and Babylonian Empires and Other States of the Near East, from the Eighth to the Sixth Centuries BC*, 2nd Edition, (Cambridge, 2008), 711, 708-09.

(3) A. J. Spangler, *Aspects of the Military Documents on the Ancient Egyptians* (New Haven-London, 1982), 221.

region at some point.⁽¹⁾ The Egyptians furthermore intervened to support their former ally, the Assyrians, against the Babylonians. As a result, Psamtik I filled the vacuum in the southern Levant.⁽²⁾ According to the Babylonian Chronicle for 616 BC, the Egyptian army supported the Assyrian army in pursuit of Nabopolassar, king of Babylonia, to the Euphrates.⁽³⁾ Herodotus (Book II: 157) mentions that the king of Egypt besieged Ashdod, the Philistine city that fell after 29 years. Another passage in Herodotus (Book I: 105) states how Psamtik I stopped an invasion of Scythians⁽⁴⁾ from invading Egypt by presenting them with gifts. There are some doubts concerning those two occurrences, however, Egypt was probably involved in some activities in South West Asia toward the end of Psamtik's long reign.

However, this empire collapsed because of the dynastic struggles and the highly centralized structure of the state.⁽⁵⁾ Once Assyria's control over southern Mesopotamia had slipped after the death of Assurbanipal, the local official Nabopolassar (626-605 BC), usurped the throne of Babylon in 626 BC, and in 616 BC he successfully united the entire region under his strong rule. As a result, he established the so-called Neo-Babylonian Dynasty of the Chaldean Dynasty of Babylon (626-539 BC),⁽⁶⁾ and was a crucial element in putting an end to

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- (1) See, for instance, N. Naaman, Ekron under the Assyrian and Egyptian Empires, *BASOR* 332 (2003), 81-91.
 - (2) B. U. Schipper, Egypt and the Kingdom of Judah under Josiah and Jehoiakim, *Tel Aviv* 37 (2010), 200.
 - (3) James, Egypt: The Twenty-Fifth and Twenty-Sixth Dynasties, 714; Morkot, *The A to Z of Ancient Egyptian Warfare*, 173-74.
 - (4) The Scythians first appeared in the 8th century BC in the south of Russia. Herodotus (Book IV: 11) mentioned that the Scythians were nomadic tribes living in Asia, see O. Szemerényi, *Four Old Iranian Ethnic Names. Scythian–Skudra–Sogdian–Saka*, *Veröffentlichungen der iranischen Kommission 9* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1980), 5; Vladimir G. Petrenko, *Scythian Culture in the North Caucasus*, In J. Davis-Kimball, V. A. Bashilov, and L. T. Yablonsky (eds.), *Nomads of the Eurasian Steppes in the Early Iron Age* (Berkeley, 1995), 5-25.
 - (5) Van de Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 229, 244.
 - (6) D. J. Wiseman, *Babylonia 605-539 B.C.*, In J. Boardman, I. E. S. Edwards, E. Sollberger and N. G. L. Hammond (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient His-*

the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Because of the weak grasp of Assyria over its Syro-Palestinian vassal states and its defeat in the last decades of its existence, Babylonia took over most of these states. Thus, Egypt had to fill the void in the Levant and had to encounter Babylonia for control over this very important and strategic region.⁽¹⁾

Nekau II Wahemibre (610-595 BC): Confrontation with Babylonia

The support for Assyria and expansion into Palestine continued in the reign of Nekau II, Psamtik I's son and successor.⁽²⁾ Therefore, Nekau II marched northward to assist his Assyrian allies and to extend Egyptian control over the Levant. In 605 BC the Egyptians fought and extended their control in Syria, but they were defeated in the battle of Carchemish by the Babylonians. The Babylonian ruler Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562 BC)⁽³⁾ stopped Egypt from gaining control over the Levant, and Egypt was restricted to its own borders.⁽⁴⁾ The Babylonian forces secured dominion over Hamath, the Aramean States/Damascus, Philistia, and all the kings of western Asia became Babylonian vassals (including Judah for three years, 603-601; cf. 2 Kings 24:1). In his fourth year (601/600) Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt, but his army was crushed near Migdol by Nekau II, who occupied Gaza (Herodotus, II, 159; cf. Jer. 47:1b), and persuaded the Judean king to revolt. In his seventh year, Nebuchadnezzar campaigned against Judah and conquered Jerusalem in March, 597, appointing Zedekiah as king. At that time Nekau had evacuated Gaza.⁽⁵⁾ When Josiah,⁽⁶⁾ king of the kingdom of Judah (Mamlekheth Yehuda),

tory, Vol. III, Part 2, The Assyrian and Babylonian Empires and Other States of the Near East, from the Eighth to the Sixth Centuries BC, 2nd Edition (Cambridge, 2008), 229-41.

- (1) Van de Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 276.
- (2) Morkot, *The A to Z of Ancient Egyptian Warfare*, 174.
- (3) For more, on his wars with Egypt, see Y. H. Katzenstein, *Nebuchadnezzar's Wars with Egypt*, *Eretz-Israel* 24 (1993), 184-86.
- (4) M. D. Coogan, *A Brief Introduction to the Old Testament. The Hebrew Bible in its Context* (New York-Oxford, 2009) 287-88.
- (5) Katzenstein, *Nebuchadnezzar's wars with Egypt*.
- (6) On more on the king, see M. A. Sweeney, *King Josiah of Judah. The Lost*

tried to stop the advancing Egyptian army, he was killed in a battle at Megiddo in 609 BC. However, there is no mention of this event in Assyrian and Egyptian sources. The biblical accounts (II Kings 23: 29-30; II Chronicles 35: 20-5) mention the attempt of Josiah, king of Judah, to be in the way of an Egyptian advance to the Euphrates. The fighting armies met at Megiddo. As a result, in 609 BC Josiah, was killed and his army was defeated.⁽¹⁾ The son of Josiah, Jehoahaz, succeeded his father on the throne, however three months later Nekau II replaced him by with another son of Josiah from the Davidic line, his brother Jehoiakim (his throne name) or Eliakim (608-598 BC), who became a loyal Egyptian vassal, and then Nekau II took Jehoahaz captive to Egypt and Judah paid tribute to Egypt.

When the Babylonians attacked the Egyptian eastern frontier, the king of Judah, Jehoiakim, became a Babylonian vassal, however, the Babylonians never succeeded in conquering Egypt and they withdrew.⁽²⁾ According to the Babylonian Chronicle, late in 610 BC the king of Assyria, Ashur-uballit II (611-?), with the support of the Egyptian army left Harran in Syria before the arrival of the forces of the Babylonian king Nabopolassar (626-605 BC). The support of the Egyptian was probably sent in the end of the reign of Psamtik I. In 609 BC the Assyrian king Ashur-uballit II retook Harran through the Egyptian support. The Egyptians might have had supremacy over Phoenicia and Lebanon.⁽³⁾ During his reign, Nekau II probably maintained a general control over South West Asia from the Phoenician coast to Carchemish in the north on the Euphrates, which showed some traces of Egyptian occupation, including Judah. After the re-

Messiah of Israel (Oxford-New York, 2001).

- (1) II Kings 23, 29; M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, II Kings. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (AB 11; Garden City: Doubleday, 1988), 300-302; cf. A. Malamat, The Kingdom of Judah between Egypt and Babylon. A Small State within a Great Power Confrontation, *Studia Theologica* 44 (1) (1990), 65-77.
- (2) Coogan, A Brief Introduction to the Old Testament, 288; M. Cogan, Into Exile. From the Assyrian Conquest of Israel to the Fall of Babylon, In M. D. Coogan (ed.), *The Oxford History of the Biblical World* (New York, 2001), 242-75.
- (3) James, Egypt. The Twenty-Fifth and Twenty-Sixth Dynasties, 715.

treat of the Assyrians from the Levant, Egypt took over. In 609 BC the Egyptian army defeated Babylonian forces. In 606 BC an Egyptian army besieged and occupied Kimuhu,⁽¹⁾ south of Carchemish in Syria, with its Babylonian garrison, and later in the year, Egyptian force crossed the Euphrates and defeated the Babylonian army at the city of Quramati, south of Kimuhu and east of the Euphrates.⁽²⁾ According to the Babylonian Chronicle, the Babylonian crown prince Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the Egyptian army. In 605 BC Nebuchadnezzar II (604–562 BC) defeated the Egyptian army at Carchemish and destroyed another at Hamath.⁽³⁾ As a result, Necho II abandoned Asia Minor and the Babylonians took over. Nabopolassar attacked the eastern Egyptian border. There is a letter from a ruler of a Phoenician city seeking help from the king of Egypt against the Babylonians. According to the Babylonian Chronicle, in December 601/January 600 BC. Nebuchadnezzar II attacked the eastern frontier of Egypt but he was forced to withdraw to home.⁽⁴⁾ However, there was no clear winner on the battlefield.⁽⁵⁾ Herodotus (Book II: 159) records a campaign of Necho II in which he gained a victory over Magdolos⁽⁶⁾ and captured Kadytis (probably Gaza?), without fixing locations or dates. In Judah, King Jehoiakim died before the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem on March 16 597 BC,⁽⁷⁾ and his young son Jehoiachin was taken captive to Babylon and replaced by Jehoiakim's uncle, Zedekiah.⁽⁸⁾

(1) A. Curtis, Oxford Bible Atlas, 4th ed. (Oxford-New York, 2009), 123.

(2) O. Lipschitz, The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem. Judah Under Babylonian Rule (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 34.

(3) Morkot, The A to Z of Ancient Egyptian Warfare, 155.

(4) Morkot, The A to Z of Ancient Egyptian Warfare, 155.

(5) D. Kahn and O. Tammuz, Egypt is Difficult to Enter. Invading Egypt - A Game Plan (Seventh-Fourth Centuries BCE), JSSEA 35 (2008), 60.

(6) See E. D. Oren, Migdol. A New Fortress on the Edge of the Eastern Nile Delta, BASOR 256 (1984), 7-44.

(7) Morkot, The A to Z of Ancient Egyptian Warfare, 112.

(8) James, Egypt. The Twenty-Fifth and Twenty-Sixth Dynasties, 715-17.

Psamtik II Neferibre (595-589 BC): Invading the Levant

The strong struggle between Egypt and Babylonia for control over Palestine continued.⁽¹⁾ Therefore, Egypt had to secure its interest in the southern Levant. Although in 591/90 BC Psamtik II did not dispatch military campaign to Palestine, there is mention in Papyrus Rylands IX of an expedition Psamtik II led to the land of Kharu (Syria-Palestine) in 592 BC in his fourth regnal year.⁽²⁾ However, some scholars confirm the military nature of this expedition.⁽³⁾ In 589 BC, Psamtik II was the pharaoh who encouraged Judah to revolt against Babylonia,⁽⁴⁾ probably to have control over this very important kingdom to Egypt.

Apries Wahibre Haaibre (589-570 BC): In the Footsteps of the Saite Fathers

It is not strange that Apries Wahibre Haaibre (biblical: Hophra) followed the same policy of his father Psamtik II and his grandfather Nekau II. In 589, Apries Wahibre Haaibre persuaded Zedekiah to re-

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- (1) G. Mumford, *Egypto-Levantine Relations during the Iron Age to Early Persian Periods (Dynasties Late 20 to 26)*. In T. Schneider and K. Szpakowska (eds.), *Egyptian Stories. A British Egyptological Tribute to Alan B. Lloyd on the Occasion of His Retirement* (Münster, 2007), 233; S. Sauneron and J. Yoyotte, *Sur la politique palestinienne des rois saïtes. Vetus Testamentum 2.2* (1952), 131-36; K. A. Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (1100-650 B.C.)* (Warminster, 1996), 406-7.
 - (2) Mumford, *Egypto-Levantine Relations during the Iron Age to Early Persian Periods (Dynasties Late 20 to 26)*, 233; K. S. Freedy and D. B. Redford, *The Dates in Ezekiel in Relation to Biblical, Babylonian and Egyptian Sources*, *JAOS* 90 (3) (1970), 479; James, *Egypt. The Twenty-Fifth and Twenty-Sixth Dynasties*, 718; F. L. Griffith, *Catalogue of the Demotic Papyri in the John Rylands Library, Vol. III* (Manchester, 1909), 93-98; G. Vittmann, *Der demotische Papyrus Rylands 9, Vol. I, Text und Übersetzung* (Wiesbaden, 1998), 349-50.
 - (3) D. Kahn, *Some Remarks on the Foreign Policy of Psammetichus II in the Levant (595-589 B.C.)*, *JoEH* 1 (1) (2008), 148; A. B. Lloyd, *The Late Period (664-332 BC)*, In I. Shaw (ed.), *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 381.
 - (4) M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 17 and the Policy of Psammetichus II*, *JBL* 76 (4) (1957), 307.

volt (cf. 2 Kings 24:20). When the Babylonian king sent forces to occupy Judah and its capital, the Egyptian king tried in vain to intervene (cf. Jer. 37:7). After the conquest of Jerusalem and the abolition of the Judean kingship, Nebuchadnezzar deposed all the other kings in western Asia. The Judean prophets expected military action against Egypt (cf. Jer. 43: 10 ff; Ezek. 29: 18; 30 3 f), but the long siege of Tyre (ca. 585-573/2) postponed the Babylonian campaign against Egypt, which took place only in Nebuchadnezzar's thirty seventh year (568/567), when the revolt of the soldiers had deposed Apries Wahibre Haaibre and Amasis had become king in Egypt.⁽¹⁾ Therefore, in 589 BC Apries Wahibre Haaibre sent a military force to put an end to the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem, however, the Egyptian army failed and retreated and Nebuchadnezzar II took the city in 586 BC.⁽²⁾ Apries Wahibre Haaibre attacked the Phoenician towns of Sidon and Tyre held under Babylonian occupation.⁽³⁾ In 568 BC Nebuchadnezzar II led a campaign against Egypt and attacked the east Delta frontier in order to reinstate Apries Wahibre Haaibre had been ousted by his general, Amasis, where the archaeological evidence shows destruction levels at Tell el-Maskhuta and probably at Tel Qedwa.⁽⁴⁾ Apries Wahibre Haaibre was killed, probably in a battle, and buried by his successor Amasis at the royal necropolis at the capital Sais in the central Delta.⁽⁵⁾

(1) Katzenstein, Nebuchadnezzar's wars with Egypt.

(2) Morkot, *The A to Z of Ancient Egyptian Warfare*, 112.

(3) Mumford, *Egypto-Levantine Relations during the Iron Age to Early Persian Periods (Dynasties Late 20 to 26)*, 234; Morkot, *The A to Z of Ancient Egyptian Warfare*, 249.

(4) D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings (626-556 B.C.)* (London, 1956), 94 BM 78-10-15, 22, 37 and 38; J. S. Holladay, Jr. et al. *Cities of the Delta, Part III. Tell el-Maskhuta. Preliminary Report on the Wadi Tumilat Project 1978-1979. American Research in Egypt Reports, Vol. 6* (Malibu, 1982), 23-4; G. D. Mumford, *International Relations between Egypt, Sinai and Syria-Palestine in the Late Bronze Age to Early Persian Period (Dynasties 18-26: c. 1550-525 BC)*, (PhD Dissertation: University of Toronto, 1998), 483-4 [n. 137].

(5) Morkot, *The A to Z of Ancient Egyptian Warfare*, 249.

Amasis Khnemibre (570-526 BC): Turning to the Greek World

Amasis (or Ahmose II) came to the throne during an army rebellion following the failure of a campaign sent against Cyrene by Apries Wahibre Haaibre. Apries Wahibre Haaibre attempted to regain the throne with the help of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II who invaded Egypt. However, the invading force was defeated, and Apries Wahibre Haaibre was killed.⁽¹⁾ Amasis followed a new policy and directed his interests toward the Greek world. Therefore, Amasis attacked and defeated Cyprius and imposed tribute payments upon it.⁽²⁾ Both the Babylonians and the Egyptians claimed victory, but it was suggested that an agreement was reached, giving Nebuchadnezzar the overlordship in western Asia and Amasis a firm position as the Egyptian Pharaoh. Many years later, Babylonia and Egypt became allies (together with Lydia) against Persia, the rising new power.⁽³⁾ In ca. 562 BC Nebuchadnezzar II died. The new threat to Egypt and Western Asia was Persia under Cyrus the Great who invaded Babylonia in 539 BC⁽⁴⁾ and expanded power over the Levant in ca. 539-538,⁽⁵⁾ and he died in 530 BC.

Psamtik III Ankhkaenre (525-526 BC): The Fall of the Saite Dynasty

Psamtik III, son of Amasis and the last king of the Saite Dynasty, did not reign for long, only for six months. In 525 BC the Persian king, Cambyses, invaded Egypt and ended the rule of the Saite Dynasty. There was a battle at Pelusion, and the Egyptian army was de-

(1) Morkot, *The A to Z of Ancient Egyptian Warfare*, 3.

(2) Mumford, *Egypto-Levantine Relations during the Iron Age to Early Persian Periods (Dynasties late 20 to 26)*, 234; E. Edel, *Amasis und Nebuchadnezzar II*, *GM* 29 (1978), 13-20; Herodotus II, 178-82; Diodorus I: 68.

(3) Katzenstein, *Nebuchadnezzar's wars with Egypt*.

(4) Curtis, *Oxford Bible Atlas*, 126.

(5) James, *Egypt. The Twenty-Fifth and Twenty-Sixth Dynasties*, 720, 725; E. Stern, *Material Culture of the Land of the Bible in the Persian Period 538-332 B.C.* (Warminster, 1982), vii; Mumford, *Egypto-Levantine Relations during the Iron Age to Early Persian Periods (Dynasties Late 20 to 26)*, 234.

feated and withdrew to Memphis which the Persians captured.⁽¹⁾ According to Herodotus, Psamtik III was executed by the Persians after the discovery of his role in a plot. As a result, Cambyses ignored his reign and dated his reign in Egypt from the death of Amasis.⁽²⁾ In the face of the Persian danger, stable and diplomatic relationships between Egypt and Babylonia were established.⁽³⁾

The Nature of Saite Expansion and Presence in the Levant

Some scholars argue that the Pharaohs of the early Saite period, Psamtik I and Nekau II, “practiced a form of imperialism by establishing a system of vassal states in the Southern Levant.”⁽⁴⁾ However, it is not easy to speak of establishing an Egyptian empire at the Southern Levant at the early Saite Period for some reasons. Egypt had always interests in the Levant and the trade routes were the main focus of Egyptian attention in the region. The Southern Levant was a region of Egyptian influence and interest and was not part of a huge empire as it was in the time of the New Kingdom.

Conclusions

The Saite foreign policy in the Levant in the seventh and sixth centuries BC, (664-526 BC), changed over time due the mosaic nature of the region and the different external players on the Levantine scene, such as Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia in addition to Egypt. As always, South West Asia was a source of danger for Egypt, and

(1) Morkot, *The A to Z of Ancient Egyptian Warfare*, 174.

(2) Morkot, *The A to Z of Ancient Egyptian Warfare*, 174.

(3) Mumford, *Egypto-Levantine Relations during the Iron Age to Early Persian Periods (Dynasties Late 20 to 26)*, 234 [n. 57]; A. L. Oppenheim, *Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts*, In J. B. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament with Supplement*, 3rd ed. (Princeton, 1969), 561-3; J. M. Miller and J. H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia, 1986), 428-9.

(4) B. U. Schipper, *Egyptian Imperialism after the New Kingdom. The 26th Dynasty and the Southern Levant*, In S. Bar, D. Kahn, and J. J. Shirley (eds.), *Egypt, Canaan and Israel. History, Imperialism, Ideology and Literature. Proceedings of a Conference at the University of Haifa, 3-7 May 2009* (Leiden-Boston, 2011), 268-90.

the Saite kings were forced to participate in the complicated politics of their Asiatic neighbors to secure Egypt's interests into the very strategic region of Syria-Palestine. In order to achieve so, the Saite pharaohs utilized some ways to deal with the Levantine affairs which were rapidly changing; and as a result Egypt's foreign policy was not stable over time and was colored by warfare with the powers of the period. The Egyptians were looking for trade and abandoned interference into the internal affairs of the Syro-Palestinian vassal states.

The Saite foreign policy in the Levant had many faces, changed over time, and was based on warfare, trade, and diplomacy. Psamtik I is the Egyptian pharaoh who tried to restore Egypt's interests in the Levant.⁽¹⁾ His successor, Nekau II Wehemibre had an active military policy in the Levant. Psamtik II also focused on the Levant as well. Apries Haaibre also got involved in the affairs of the Levant. However, Amasis depended on his alliances with the Greeks, and the very short-reigned king, Psamtik III, did not have any activity in the Levant.

(1) Through their military campaigns into the Levant, the early 18th Dynasty kings, especially Thutmose III, created an Egyptian empire in South West Asia. On the military roads which those kings utilized, see E. D. Oren, The "Ways of Horus" in North Sinai. In A. F. Rainey (ed.), *Egypt, Israel, Sinai. Archaeological and Historical Relationships in the Biblical Period* (Tel Aviv, 1987), 69-119. On the Egyptian empire in Palestine, see J. M. Weinstein, *The Egyptian Empire in Palestine-A Reassessment*, BASOR 241, 18-21. On one of the Levantine sites showing Egyptian administrative center, see T. Dothan, *The Impact of Egypt on Canaan during the 18th and the 19th Dynasties in the Light of the Excavations at Deir el-Balah*, In A. F. Rainey (ed.), *Egypt, Israel, Sinai. Archaeological and Historical Relationships in the Biblical Period* (Tel Aviv, 1987), 121-35. On the Egyptian Empire in the New Kingdom, see B. M. Bryan, *The 18th Dynasty before the Amarna Period (c. 1550-1352 BC)*, In I. Shaw (ed.), *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, (Oxford-New York), 218-71. On the military titles of New Kingdom high officials, see J. J. Shrilly, *What's in A Title? Military and Civil Officials in the Egyptian 18th Dynasty Military Sphere*, In S. Bar, D. Kahn, and J. J. Shirley (eds.), *Egypt, Canaan and Israel. History, Imperialism, Ideology and Literature. Proceedings of a Conference at the University of Haifa, 3-7 May 2009* (Leiden-Boston, 2011), 291-19.

The assumption of the existence of Egyptian empire in the Levant is hard to be accepted for some reasons. In general the Saite policy toward the Levant was mainly concerned with securing Egypt's trade routes into the region, and with defending Egypt's frontiers. Warfare was among the major tools that Egypt employed to achieve its goals in this very important region. The struggle between Egypt and Babylonia over control in the Levant was strong and occupied the whole of the sixth century BC. However, in 539 BC the Persians, in the reign of Cyrus the Great, invaded Babylonia and ended the power of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, and in 526 BC they put an end to the Saite Dynasty and annexed Egypt to their vast empire.

**Learners' Cognitive Aspects
and Prospective of Listening
Comprehension**

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Abstract

The main purpose of the current paper is to investigate, in details, the cognitive processes involved in learning listening comprehension to determine to what extent, they account for language learning at university level. Moreover, the study aims to identify ESL learners' real-time problems faced during listening. Examples and evidences are derived from a sample of second year students at the Faculty of Education, Damanhour University, Department of English language. A set of questions were derived from Zhang & Zhang (2011) scale and programed in google form to evaluate students' listening dialogues and texts of listening comprehension. Language acquisition is, thus, seen as having certain cognitive prerequisites or co-requisites. Results of discussion showed that learners will not develop linguistic patterns before acquiring the cognitive bases for those forms, as there is a big gap between their needs and their real abilities. The current paper is organized as follows: firstly, some theoretical issues related to the cognitive aspects involved in listening comprehension, to the listening teaching / learning and to the evaluation of listening comprehension will be presented. Secondly, research results achieved will be described. Thirdly, some thoughts were developed, orientated by the objectives described.

Key words: listening problems, listening comprehension, auditory memory, speed of response, linguistic competence.

Introduction

Much attention in listening comprehension research has been paid to L2 learners' self-awareness of the difficulties encountered in listening Zhang & Zhang (2011). One spends a lot of times listening to others speaking or listening to songs, news, lectures, YouTube, or listening for academic purposes or obtaining necessary information at work. As for foreign language learning, listening is of paramount importance since O'connor (1980) said that learning starts with our ears and Rost (1994) stated that it provides the language input. Listening comprehension is one of the vital skills in the language acquisition process. It is the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages in the communication process. It is an essential skill

for students' academic success (Vandergrift, 2004). For Croft (1980) listening is considered the first and most important skill responsible for learning and acquiring the other skills. Thus, listening comprehension – as Krashen (1983) confirmed it provides the right conditions for language acquisition and the development of other language skills.

Second language listening comprehension is a complex and crucial process in the development of second language competence; yet, the importance of listening in language learning has only been recognized relatively recently (Nunan, 1998; Celce-Murcia, 2001). During listening in English, students – as Moradi (2015) confirms - are faced with greater difficulties because they should comprehend subject matter delivered in English as well as understand the speaker's accent and speed of delivery. Their perception and awareness of their inability to listen well may prevent them from listening well. Another factor of their bad listening may be the teachers' inability to provide them with a native-like accent. This is resulted in inability to improve listening by listening to natives, but only to non-native speakers which deepen their inability to adapt good listening habits. Additionally, listening comprehension requires understanding the speakers' intended message. Listeners do not passively listen to speakers to understand the meaning of the messages, but actively interpret the speakers' expected meaning and acquire meaningful information by assimilating sounds, words, and phrases (Woottipong, 2014). Therefore, listening comprehension is not only challenging for native speakers, but is even more challenging for foreign language learners. Therefore, listening comprehension development is of prime concern to language teachers (Dunkel, 1991).

Egyptian EFL university students in general and EFL freshman university students at Damanhour University, Faculty of Education ,in particular, have long been seen to have trouble with listening comprehension. They face a difficulty in improving their listening skill within the traditional way of learning (Alakawi, 2016). Surveying many studies that investigated listening comprehension at the university level (e.g., Beehery, 2016; Hassan, 2015; Khalil, 2015; Mohammed, 2014; Salem, 2014; Al- Tonsi, 2013; and El-naggar, 2005), the

researcher noticed that EFL university students encounter many problems in their listening skills in general and listening comprehension, in particular. A lot of researchers dealt with listening problems (Chen 2002). For successful language learning, there should be an amount of correct language input which, if not enough, can cause a lot of problems in listening for learners. To help learners to become skillful listeners, factors behind learners' listening difficulties have been identified in many studies. Such studies are, for example, text types (Brindley, & Slatyer, 2002; Su, 2003), speech rate (Teng, 2002), and task types (Cheng, 2004), syntactical complexity (Chiang & Dunkle, 1992) and topic familiarity and English proficiency (Vandergrift, 2006). The most effective for Azmi Bingol, et. al, (2014) Poelmans, (2003) of these problems are listed as follows:

- 1- Lack of control over the speed at which speakers speak besides not being able to get things repeated; which means the speed of receptive memory is not the same of auditory memory.
- 2- The listener's limited vocabulary is a second major problem that binds language fluency; where the learner's language storage is not enough to match the incoming listened to language.
- 3- Failure to recognize the "signals" of native accent limits students' response for fear of committing mistakes.
- 4- Inability to concentrate or establish good listening habits due to the anxiety of face to face group interaction which lead to inability to control over distraction.
- 5- Loss of interest or purpose for listening.
- 6- Cultural differences; learners should be familiar with the cultural knowledge of language that has a significant effect on the learners' understanding. If the listening task involves completely distinct cultural materials then the learners may have problems in their comprehension.

Listening problems are classified into another two distinct categories (Hasan, 2000) namely problems related to the listeners, listening materials and equipment like: a) Making prediction of what the speaker talks about, b) Guessing unknown words or phrases, c) Rec-

ognizing main points, d) Insistence on listening word by word. This process limits learners' concentration and prevents them from getting the task target. This consumes a lot of their attention which should be focused on other aims of the listening task, e) Linking words (Liaison and Elision) as they get used to seeing words as separate units in the written text and bad speaking habits prevent them from perceiving the word linked to others through linking rules.

Other problems related to listening material like: a) Unfamiliarity of topics, b) Unfamiliarity with sound connections or intonation of spoken text, c) Ignoring listening in course work of studying, d) Speed of speech. If the listening text is too long learners' lose concentration as mind can not keep attention more than 10 minutes (The length of time students listen may cause memory problems or even fatigue and this would distract listeners' attention from grasping the meaning of the text, and learners may miss the rest of the text when there is a lapse in concentration. This may be attributed to the short memory span for the target language (Hasan, 2000: 143).

In addition to problems related to physical settings like: a) Noise: the surrounding environment, b) Poor equipment. Other problems emerge from the speech rate, vocabulary and pronunciation (Higgins, 1995). Prediction as being one of listeners' problems is so important as Berman (2003) thought, would maintain the students' focus on their tasks; hence lead to comprehension improvement. The interrelations between language, cognition, and development have always been a matter of considerable interest to language teachers, applied linguists and psycholinguists. As with oral communication, listening is an exclusively human ability. Listening, or listening comprehension, is a highly complex phenomenon involving unexpected cognitive aspects; some of these are highlighted in this article.

Focusing on the importance of listening comprehension skill, Brown (2001) and O'connor (1980) suggest that learning starts with the ears; with an active process through which language acquisition takes place. Listening is more than merely hearing words, but an active process by which learners receive, construct meaning from, and respond to spoken messages. Hence, four kinds of listening are identified; a) listening comprehensive; where learners listen for getting

the content of a message, b) appreciative listening; where learners listen for enjoyment, c) therapeutic listening where learners listen to support others but not judge them, and d) critical (evaluative) listening; where learners judge the message. (Buck, 2001; Rost, 2002; Vandergrift, 2004).

Listening is the interaction between sound unit (s) tied to each other according to certain rules of syntax, morphology and intonation patterns within the context of situational clues- accompanied by certain situational clues and a listener; where he interprets these sound units using a complex web of cognitive procedures. Through listening, one can internalize and understand language which is the key tool for communication with our real world. In recent years, the language teaching profession has placed a concerted emphasis on listening comprehension (Brown, 2001).

Brownell (1996) claims that listening skill requires conscious mental effort presented in some activities which are processes that effective listeners do during listening namely; 1) Find relations between people, places, situations, and ideas, 2) Find meaning or determine what the speaker is saying about people, places, and ideas, 3) Make predictions by trying to determine what will be said next, 4) Make inferences by determining a speaker's intent between the lines, and 5) Reflect and evaluate by responding to what is heard and pass judgment. These features and processes can be represented in Figure (1).

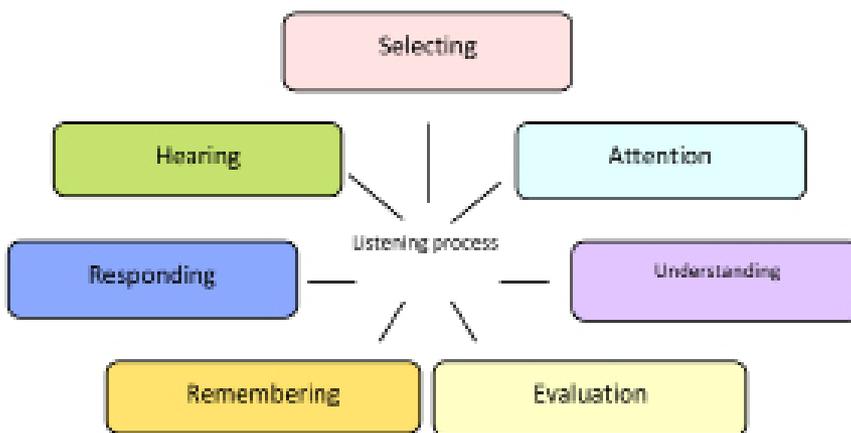


Fig. 1: 7 Steps of Listening Process

The figure shows that the listening process is continuous and each of the seven steps is based on the previous or/and the next one. Any of the learners can not select without hearing or paying attention. In addition, he can not evaluate unless he understands and remembers to connect ideas together. This process may be responsible for the creative use of the language where one can respond in new situations using the language one learnt before. As seen they are all cognitive mental processes. Morley (1972) pointed out that listening involves auditory discrimination, aural grammar, selecting necessary information, remembering it, and connecting it to the process between sound and form of meaning. Thus, Goss (1982) defined listening as a process of understanding what is heard and organizing it into lexical elements to which meaning can be allocated.

Listening, stimulates responses which differ from each other and indicate understanding to what is received by giving appropriate response and consequently effective communication. This is called a listening comprehension process and it has four other processes represented in Figure (2):

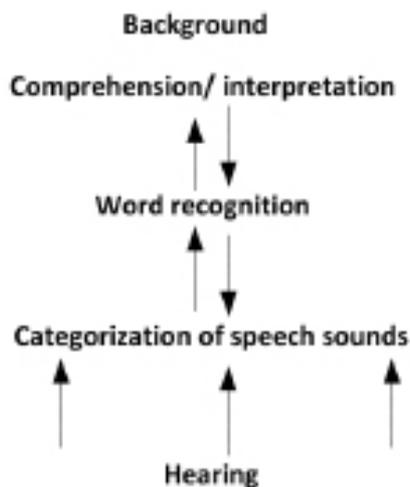


Fig. (2): Simplified Overview of the Listening Process and Sub-Processes

(Source: Poelmans, 2003.11)

Figure (2) shows that there is interaction and integration between the listening processes. At the same time, none of these processes are performed, but with and based on the others. As a result, researchers have presented more interest in listening comprehension which is treated as a fundamental skill in terms of language teaching (Osada, 2004). Listeners comprehend the oral input through sound discrimination, previous knowledge, grammatical structures, stress and intonation, and the other linguistic or non-linguistic clues. Comprehension begins with the received data that is examined as consecutive levels of formation and a process of decoding in the brain (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). Most of learners' problems emerged, as seen above, from the inappropriate use of one strategy of learning or performance. They translate word-for-word, their and the inability to follow the rate of speech make them unable to get the main idea of speech. They may repeat the oral text but with an incorrect accent which spoiled the language input information, thus, concentrating on prosodic characteristics of the text.

Listening is the most common communicative activity in daily life, however, we probably are not even aware of how complex it is. Listening as a skill forms a correct channel to add additional information to mind storage through sets: creating mental linkage, applying images and sound, reviewing well and employing action. Cognitive operations like reviewing, recognizing, reasoning, and creating ideas and perceptions in the listeners' mind in the form of inputs are the main target from listening to pave the way for comprehension feedback in the form of language output (speaking or writing). Comprehension begins with the received data that is examined as consecutive levels of formation and a process of decoding during the previous steps. Rost (2002) defined listening as a complex process of interpretation in which listeners match what they hear with what they already know.

Listening is the most frequently used language skill; for 50 percent of learners time is spent in listening (Morley, 1999; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992, Jafari & Hashim , 2015). For Bird (1953) listening is not a passive process, it involves a lot of mental procedures to be appropriately done. The present research briefly sheds light on what

is involved in learning how to understand what one hears in a second language. The following micro-skills the listener should use are proposed by Richards (1983 as cited in Omaggio, 1986, 126). These micro-skills are required to understand what we hear:

- retain chunks of language in short-term memory (by reviewing)
- discriminate among the distinctive sounds in the new language (by recognizing)
- recognize stress and rhythm patterns, tone patterns, intonational contours. (by recognizing)
- recognize reduced forms of words. (by recognizing)
- distinguish word boundaries (by reasoning)
- recognize typical word-order patterns (by recognizing)
- recognize vocabulary (by recognizing)
- detect key words, such as those identifying topics and ideas (by reasoning)
- guess meaning from context (by creating)
- recognize grammatical word classes (by recognizing)
- recognize basic syntactic patterns (by recognizing)
- recognize cohesive devices (by recognizing)
- detect sentence constituents, such as subject, verb, object, prepositions, and the like (by reasoning)

Thus, recognition is the main process in comprehension whereas comprehension is the target of listening. Comprehension occurs when input (information received) and knowledge stored in brain are matched with each other. Perception, parsing and utilization stand for various levels of processing. Kintsch (1998, p. 13) pointed out that for one to be able to think, to understand and to perceive, mental interpretation is needed. “Once it is assumed that listening involves forms of mental interpretation, what is being presumed is that listening requires several types of memories(long memory or short memory)”. As mental representations are nothing more than the translation of what we perceive or intake from the surround by environment and from our experiences into a language, how the storage mechanisms of this knowledge in the brain works must be understood. In other words,at the end, listening comprehension involves the way that neurons acquire, transfer and integrate information throughout the un-

countable synapses available in the human brain. Memorization is the usual main strategy mostly used by learners.

Participants and Tools

In order to determine problems encountered by second year students at the Faculty of Education, Damanhour University, Department of English language the researcher executed a pilot study using a questionair to check (160) learners' responses about listening problems and sources of theses problems in their listening habits. Anumber of questions were derived from Zhang &Zhang (2011) scale concerning listening performance. These questions indicat if learners already have real time listening comprehension problems or not. If learners have what were these and how they constitute learneres' perception about listening. These questions were programed in a google form and is formulated in main five points. Results of the questions were discussed as follows.

Results and Discussions

Hence, reflections of the problems encountered by learners in listening constitute a part of their knowledge about listening processes (Cross, 2009; Goh, 2000; Wenden, 1991; Zhang & Goh, 2006). Analyzing students' answers to the questions concerning real time problems and why they do not understand native spoken English, indicated astonishing responses. As indicated in figure (3) there are five main problems that face listeners in real time listening comprehension task.

About one-third of the students reported that they could not remember certain words and phrases they had just heard. They would forget them as soon as they begin listening to another part of the message. When I listen to a text, I forget the contents which was mentioned before. (comment1)

When I listen to TV news, I can understand most of words, but I forget the previous sentences after listening to the present sentence. (comment 2)

A possible cause as Howard (1983) and Anderson (1995) indicated is the limited capacity of the students' short-term memory which is

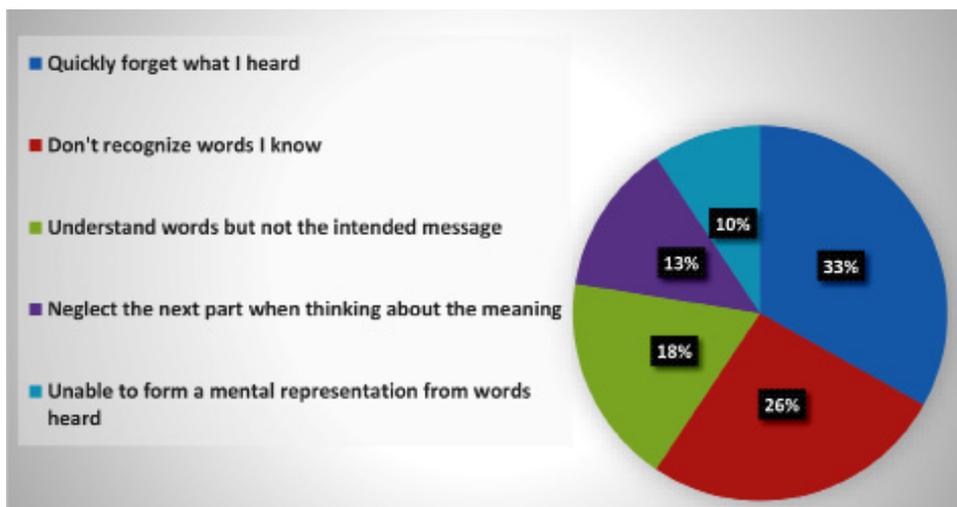


Fig. 3: Types of real time problems facing listeners

constantly cleared for new input and unless some form of association or fixation in long-term memory occurs immediately, the information will be forever wiped out from an individual's memory. This appeared to have been the problem faced by the students.

As for the second problem, 26% of students indicated that although some words sounded very familiar to them, they were unable to recall their meanings immediately. Consequently, they were unable to process the message using those words. Samples of their responses were “TV news is very easy. A lot of words sounded very familiar but I can't remember their meanings immediately. (comment 3)” “many words I know quite well, and if I read them I can easily understand. (comment 4)

A probable reason for this slow recognition is that the students could not match the sounds they hear with any script in their long-term memory. Thus, they should speed up their reaction to heard sounds. Although students identify certain words by sight, they could not recognize them by sound. This may be due to their learning habits where many of them said that they learnt by memorizing the spelling of words and often neglected to remember how the words sounded. Many years ago, these students have been trained trained to be good at reading performance, to remember words by both watching and writing, so they gradually lost the familiarity to listening. Learners

used to pronounce a lot of words incorrectly so when they listen to them correctly, they are unable to repeat or recognize them and even if they did they did not store them in the long term memory as they lose interest for lack of importance in their daily language use. Some of them reported that "I already know the words but I couldn't understand the context this time (comment 5)". I can understand most of the words, but I can not join them together and understand whole sentences meaning (comment 6), which means that they are unaware of the pronunciation rules like linking or sentence stress.

Another fundamental problem is cutting the flow of meaning when they got one word. They stop following the next part when they get the correct meaning of one word (comment 7) I can't go on listening when I understand one word as I slow my speed or even stop listening for being unable to follow up the next in the same way." "The problem I found is that there are many words that I know well, but I can't think of their meanings immediately. It takes me several minutes to react (comment 8). When I listen clearly to the first sentence and got its meaning, the second has come, so what can I do now it is quickly (comment 9)

Students are unable to follow the accent or get the whole idea especially while listening to songs even if they already remember the musical rhyme of the song. When I was listening to an English song tape, I could catch most words. But I could not put all the words into a full sentence to get a full idea (comment 10). Students may recognize words but not key words." "I don't know how to divide the long sentence into several parts. I don't know where to stop"(comment 11). This indicates that the students do not know the speaking intonation marks.

By analyzing the causes of learners' inability to comprehend the spoken text by listening and based on the Richards' (1983) classification of previous micro-skills, one can deduce that the loss of interest in the academic topics besides lack of enough practice lead to the inability to retain chunks of language in their short-term memory for motivation proved to be one of the best factors that activate memory (Heinrich,1968). As indicated in figure (4) students reported that the main cause of the problem -for most of them- is the lack of practice,

either currently or in the past when they setting up their language inputs information for first time. The second reason is unfamiliarity with native accent as learners listen to their non-native teachers all the time. Consequently, the speed of delivery from their teachers is a problem where they can not stop or slow the speaker’s talk. Thus, the speech rate affects the listening comprehension process. Hayati (2010) proved that natural speech rate improved the university Iranian learners. Other minor reasons are also important and complete the figure for teachers to modify or add other techniques to solve learners’ problems so as to have a well and effective listening comprehension class. In addition to learners suggest a lack of awareness of pronunciation and intonation features that are crucial for perception.

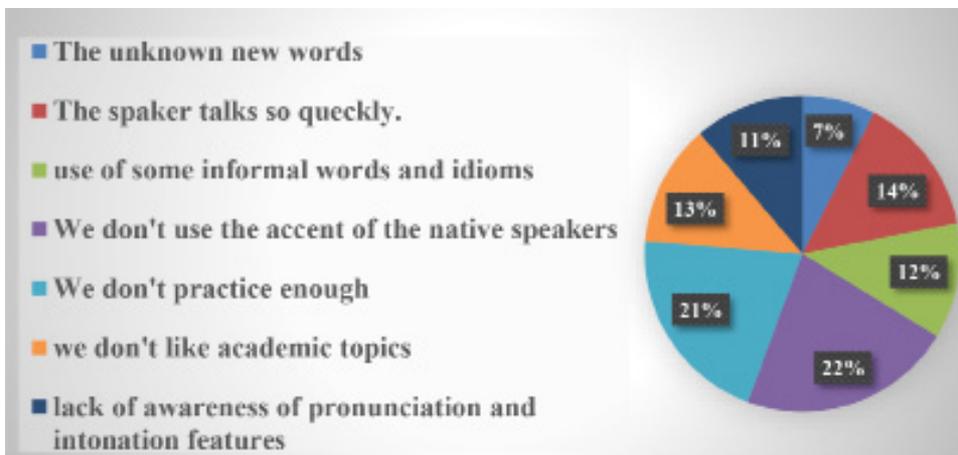


Fig. 4: Why Students don't Understand Listening

The term “listening comprehension” has been defined by different authors. According to Brown and Yule (1983), listening comprehension means that a person understands what he/she has heard. Rost (2002) and Hamouda (2013) define listening comprehension as an interactive process in which listeners are involved in constructing meaning. According to Nadig (2013), listening comprehension is the various processes of understanding and making sense of spoken language. These involve knowing speech sounds, comprehending the meaning of individual words, and understanding the syntax of sentences.

Auditory memory is the ability to remember words and sounds,

the ability to recall information which was received verbally. According to Scliar-Cabral (2010), the word “memory” designates the general ability of one’s brain systems to acquire, retain and recover stored information because of listening experience. On the other hand, one can refer to the several types of memories, classified according to their functions. Following these criteria, we have the working memory and other memories. Working memory does not generate files, it is not considered a memory because nothing is stored inside it in the brain or in the long term. Its capacity is limited to the process of about seven chunks. Based on the information processing theory, once the language transferred to the long memory it is very hard to delete or modify.

Memories are classified according to the saved content; procedural memories are “knowing how” memories work, for example, the eyes movement while listening or the speaking apparatus movements during listening to conversation or listening attention are indicators for this type. The knowledge our bodies have acquired about the necessary procedures to accomplish certain tasks is mainly unconscious and not translatable into words. This is the aspect that distinguishes procedural from declarative memories, or episodic (autobiographic) and semantic (linguistic) memories (Zimmerman, and Hutchinson, 2003).

Types of mental interpretation needed to achieve listening comprehension involve five processes; receiving, understanding, evaluating, remembering, and responding. Firstly, a perceptual and a procedural representation related to the listening material are necessary. To be able to listen to spoken words or dialogues (or screen), the listener must receive clearly the spoken sounds until the sentence ends and to understand immediately the message sent, evaluating it, analyzing it, and forming a structured response to it. Even when one is unconscious of those procedures, they were learnt at one point of a subject’s life. Monolingual listeners of Arabic, for example, while listening to someone, perform differently because of the characteristics of their speaking system stored in the long-term memory and which was acquired during their life experiences, will be retrieved while listening to form an appropriate response. In case the speaker requires knowl-

edge not stored in the listener's mind, comprehension might not be achieved.

To understand listening, it is presumed that the listener has to move on to identify the speaker's intentions, build in the spoken words through the structure used, the lexical choices he made, the hidden or expressed meanings and several other subtleties that language and human gestures created and previously agreed upon to use them in language communication. It is possible to argue that in listening comprehension process it is necessary that an interpretation of the spoken genre in question, will enable the listener to compare the elements stored previously in his memory and presented in the spoken words with previous known ones and their characteristics, stored in the long term memory to get the right meaning.

Listening comprehension requires the integration of knowledge brought from the spoken words together with the listener's previous stored knowledge. If some knowledge does not exist (heard for the first time) in the long-term memory, it is not possible to have access to it (restore). Therefore, in this case it is necessary for a mediator intervention; in the school listening, teacher's intervention is required.

Common sources of difficulties can be the tape recordings, other times can be the concepts which cannot be accessed by the listener, or the world knowledge required by the spoken words might not be compatible to the listener's world knowledge, along with several other difficulties that the listeners might have to cope with. The spoken text to be listened to with the tape's assistance must have a certain degree of challenge, but cannot turn into a complete frustration. As if the listener is unable to get the meaning after several trials of listening he will stop listening or even be frustrated.

The evaluation of comprehension is one crucial step in the listening teaching /learning process. Alternatively, the main goal while evaluating listening comprehension in the listening session is to identify the difficulties that block the listening learning process allowing for a better planning of pedagogical approaches. Faculty life cycle of learning do not have the right to devote efforts only to the best students; their duty is precisely to care for all of them, despite their differences. Faculty should provide applicable solutions to learners'

listening problems or they will go to real life workplace having these problems to many learners in future.

Implications

- Teachers should provide authentic and natural speech listening materials uttered by native speakers and appropriate to learners' needs, interests and levels to motivate them.
- Students should be provided with distinct types of listening input like lectures, radio news, films, TV plays, announcements, everyday conversation, and interviews.
- Students should be familiarized with the rules of pronunciation and encourage to imitate native speakers' accents.
- students should be provided with linguistic background knowledge while listening to different listening materials.
- students should gain necessary feedback on their performance because it can promote their error correction, increase their motivation, and develop their confidence.
- Students should have listening targets.
- Teachers should be appropriately trained in speaking skills and good pronunciation to help learners become better listeners.

Conclusion

Listening is vital not only in language learning but also in daily communication. However, listening is not an important part of many course books and most teachers do not pay attention to this important skill in their classes. This research has shown the common problems which the students in the Faculty of Education - English Language Department should avoid as freshmen students and at the same time experienced in their listening comprehension classes; and presented some applicable solutions to be part of the suggested new teaching strategies for them as future teachers. This knowledge of these problems can in turn help us trace the source of these difficulties in our learners. Knowing why some of the problems occur will naturally place us in a better position to guide our learners in ways of coping with or overcoming some of their listening difficulties. The problems

revealed can provide insights into how well learners apply listening strategies to help them deal with comprehension difficulties. When teachers are aware of students' learning difficulties, they can help them develop effective listening strategies and solve their difficulties in listening to improve their listening comprehension abilities. The review of literature indicated the factors that caused some serious problems for learners' listening comprehension and offered some useful suggestions for teachers and students to improve their listening comprehension ability.

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Appendix (1)

Listening Comprehension Problem Scale (LCPS)

This Listening Comprehension Problem Scale (LCPS) is intended for students of English as a foreign language (EFL). You will find statements about the problems that you might encounter while listening to English texts. Please read each one and choose a response from among 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 that best describes HOW TRUE (for YOU) THE STATEMENT IS.

- 1- Never true of me;
- 2- Usually not true of me;
- 3- Somewhat true of me;
- 4- Usually true of me;
- 5- Always true of me.

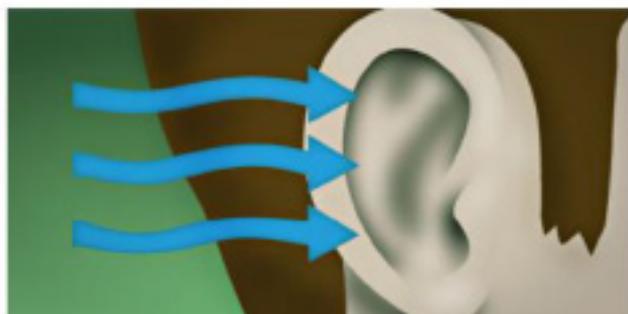
Listening comprehension Problems

N	Listening comprehension Problems	1	2	3	4	5
1	I feel nervous.					
2	I am unable to concentrate.					
3	I do not recognize the learned words.					
4	I do not respond to words quickly enough.					
5	I have difficulty in recognizing words due to					
6	There are too many new words.					
7	I have difficulty in recognizing sounds due to fast speaking.					
8	I have difficulty in recognizing sounds due to linking, assimilation, omission in speech.					
9	I have difficulty in recognizing sounds due to speakers' accent and intonation.					
10	I cannot recognize the words with similar sounds.					
11	I tend to neglect the next part when thinking about the meaning of the utterances just heard.					
12	I do not understand abstract concepts.					
13	I do not understand long sentences.					
14	I cannot chunk streams of speech.					
15	I forget quickly what is heard.					
16	I do not understand the word that has more than one meaning.					
17	I do not understand the next part of the text because of problems I encounter earlier.					
18	I miss out the beginning of texts.					
19	I do not understand the intended message of some parts of a text.					
20	I feel confused about the key ideas in the message.					
21	I do not understand the intended message of an entire text.					

Listening comprehension Problems

This Listening Comprehension Problem Scale (LCPS) is intended for you who are students of English as a foreign language (EFL). You will find statements about the problems that you might encounter while listening to English texts. Please read each one and choose a response from among 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 that best describes HOW TRUE OF YOU THE STATEMENT IS.

1. Never true of me;
2. Usually not true of me;
3. Somewhat true of me;
4. Usually true of me;
5. Always true of me.



I feel nervous.

1. Never true of me;
2. Usually not true of me;
3. Somewhat true of me;
4. Usually true of me;

