ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to compare the performances of EFL learners belonging to various personality groups in listening tests. A group of 30 high school EFL learners were selected for this study. All of them were at low-intermediate level of general English proficiency. Based on Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) personality questionnaire (2017), these participants were classified into four pairs of contrasting personality groups. The analysis of the participants’ personality types was conducted online and took about twenty minutes. Then, they took a test of listening for minimal pairs. Scores of contrasting personality groups were compared with each other by running four paired t-tests. Results obtained by these t-tests showed that intuitive participants outperformed sensing ones, and perceiving participants outperformed judging ones in the listening test. No significant difference was found between the performances of contrasting personality groups in the two pairs of extrovert/introvert and thinking/feeling. Flexibility, adaptability, and being open to a larger set of options are suggested to be possible reasons behind the success of these groups. However, the influence of large set of interacting factors that might have a significant impact on the performance of people in listening test cannot be denied. Depending on the type of listening test, some of these factors might play a more significant role compared to other competing factors.

Keywords: Personality traits, Listening, Minimal pairs, Extrovert, Introvert

1. Introduction

The relationship between personality traits and performance on various linguistic tasks has been the subject of a large body of research projects in recent years (e.g. Carrell, Prince, & Astika, 1996; Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Ehrman, 1990; Oxford & Ehrman, 1988; Yazdani Fazlabadi & Khatin-Zadeh, 2016; Zare-Behtash, Bakhshizadeh Gashiti, Khatin-Zadeh, & Banaruee, 2017; Banaruee & Yarahmadzehi, 2017). Some findings (e.g. Askari, Khatin-Zadeh, & Banaruee, 2017; Oxford & Ehrman, 1988; Yazdani Fazlabadi & Khatin-Zadeh, 2016; Banaruee, Khoshsima, & Askari, 2017) have suggested that some personality groups perform better in certain linguistic activities. Any linguistic activity involves a set of cognitive operations. The manner in which various elements interact with each other can be extremely complex in some linguistic tasks. The first thing that must be done is to identify all influential factors that are involved in an activity. Then, the influence of each element must be closely examined to find which ones play a more significant role in a given activity.

A personality test is a questionnaire that aims to measure people’s personality traits and their psychological character. Over the past decades, various personality tests have been developed by researchers in psychology and language studies to classify people into various groups. The first group of personality questionnaires was developed in 1920s (Kaplan & Saccuzzo, 2008). Among a number of questionnaires that were developed by experts of the field, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers, 1962) has been one of the most popular ones. This questionnaire was inspired by Jung’s (1923) ideas about personality. Based on this questionnaire, people’s personalities are grouped into four pairs of opposite types: extroversion /
introduction, sensing / intuition, thinking / feeling, and judging / perceiving.

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between personality traits of low-intermediate L2 learners on the basis of Myers-Briggs personality questionnaire and their level of success on listening for minimal pairs. The study focused on high school EFL learners. If it is demonstrated that such a relationship exists, we have to find some explanation for it. In such a case, a number of questions is raised; for example, ‘How do various influential elements interact with each other?’ ‘Which factors play a more significant role in a given linguistic task?’ There is no doubt that the type of an activity determines the influential elements. Administering a test of listening for minimal pairs, this study tried to investigate the existence of possible influential factors in this particular test of listening.

2. Literature Review

Extensive research administered by educational psychologists and teacher demonstrate that learning procedures differ from every individual to one another due to the existence of biological and psychological variations (Banaruee & Askari, 2016; Khatin-Zadeh et al., 2017; Banaruee, Khoshshima, & Khatin-Zadeh, 2017; Khatin-Zadeh, Khoshshima, & Banaruee, 2017; Zare-Behtash et al., 2017). Banaruee et al. (2017) argued that the preference of a learner and his learning style is as important as the personality traits the learners have, and play vital roles in language classrooms. Khoshshima and Banaruee (2017) declared that all of the students have personal characteristics associated with their learning processes and they may indicate even the type of errors learners confront in the learning process.

According to Keirsey and Bates (1984), extrovert people are sociable and external, while introverts are interested in internal reactions. They add that sensing people are mainly reliant on experience and actuality, while intuitive people are speculative and imaginative. While being objective and analytic is the main characteristic of thinking people, being subjective is one of the dominant features of feeling people. Finally, while judging people are fixed and decided, perceiving people are flexible and open to various options (pp. 25-26). Brown (2007) says that sensing people are experience-oriented and rely on facts. On the other hand, intuitive people are fiction-oriented and hunching. Sensing people are realistic, but intuitive ones are speculative (ibid).

The existence of possible relationship between personality and performance in L2 learning has been the subject of a number of past empirical studies (e.g. Askari et al., 2017; Carrell, Prince, & Astika, 1996; Zare-Behtash, Khatin-Zadeh, & Banaruee, 2017; Ehrman & Oxford, 1995, 1989; Banaruee, Mohammadian, & Zare-Behtash, 2017; Ehrman, 1990, 1989; Moody, 1988; Khatin-Zadeh, Bakhshizadeh Gashti, & Banaruee, 2017; Oxford & Ehrman, 1988; Zare-Behtash & Banaruee, 2017). In their study, Ehrman and Oxford (1990) found that extrovert L2 learners are more successful in employing social strategies in the process of language learning. Results of another study conducted by Wakamoto (2000) indicated that sensing learners tend to use memory strategies; on the other hand, intuitive learners displayed a higher tendency to use compensation strategies. In a study conducted on Iranian L2 learners, Yazdani Fazlabadi and Khatin Zadeh (2016) found that sensing and thinking learners were relatively more successful in cloze passage tasks.

According to Dewaele and Furnham (2000), extrovert bilinguals are more fluent than introvert bilinguals. Accordingly, Gan (2011) found that there is no significant correlation between extraversion/introversion and L2 learners’ oral performance. In a study conducted on a group of Iranian L2 learners (Soleimani, Jafarigohar, & Ramezani, 2013), no significant correlation was found between extraversion / introversion and the performance on multiple-choice and true false tests.

Having administered a test of listening for minimal pairs, researchers of this study tried to examine the possible existence of a relationship between the personality of high school EFL learners and their performance in the listening test. Myers-Briggs personality questionnaire was used to classify L2 learners into four pairs of contrasting personality groups. In this way, this study tried to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there any significant relationship between personality groups of people and their performance in listening for minimal pairs?
2. If there is a significant relationship between personality of people and their...
performance in listening for minimal pairs, which characteristics of people could be the cause of strong/weak performance in listening for minimal pairs?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

Participants of this study were selected from high school EFL learners in ‘Better Language Academy’, one of the language institutes in Bandar Abbas, Iran. This group consisted of 30 Iranian EFL learners, all boys, at low-intermediate level of English proficiency. They were 13-15 years old.

3.2 Materials

The Myers-Briggs personality questionnaire was used to classify participants into various personality groups. In addition to this questionnaire, a listening test was used. This test consisted of 20 items. In each item, participants were expected to distinguish between minimal pairs. The aim of this test was to investigate the ability of various personality groups of high school EFL learners to distinguish between words which were similar in pronunciation.

3.3 Procedure

The Myers-Briggs personality questionnaire was given to the participants. The answers were analyzed by software online (www. humanmetrics.com). Based on the answers, participants were included in various personality groups. Then, the test of listening for minimal pairs was administered. This test was administered in 20 minutes. Before answering the questions, participants were provided with clear oral instructions in order to make sure that they knew how to answer the items. In each pair of personality groups, the performances of two contrasting groups in listening test were compared with each other. For example, the contrasting personality groups of extroverts and introverts were compared with each other by a t-test. The aim was to find which personality group was more successful in listening test. The same procedure was used for the other three pairs of contrasting personality groups.

3.4 Data Analysis

For each pair of four personality traits, participants were classified into two contrasting groups. Scores of contrasting personalities in listening test were compared with each other by running four t-tests. The P-value obtained in each t-test could show us if there was any significant difference between the performances of contrasting personality groups. Results obtained by these four t-tests could indicate which group of personality types performed better in listening for minimal pairs. The unequal number of participants in contrasting personality groups could not create any problem for the study because running a t-test does not require the equal number of participants in the two groups. However, in this study, it was made sure that each personality group consisted of an acceptable number of participants.

4. Results

Based on the results obtained by Myers-Briggs personality questionnaire, participants were classified into contrasting personality groups. Numbers of participants in all groups have been given in Table 1.

Table 1: Numbers of participants in various personality groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extravert</th>
<th>Introvert</th>
<th>Sensing</th>
<th>Intuitive</th>
<th>Thinking</th>
<th>Feeling</th>
<th>Judging</th>
<th>Perceiving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In each pair of personality traits, the sum of participants is 30. For each pair, two sets of scores in listening tests were compared with each other by a t-test. Therefore, four t-tests were run to compare the scores of participants in four pairs of personality groups. Results of these four tests for extrovert / introvert, sensing / intuitive, thinking/feeling, and judging / perceiving have been given in Table 2, Table 3, Table 4, and Table 5.

Table 2: Results of t-test for extrovert/introvert

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>95% Confidence interval of the difference</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extrovert/ Introvert</td>
<td>0.06 from -1.90 to 2.91</td>
<td>0.0583</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0.9539</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 2, P-value is larger than 0.05. This indicates that the difference between the performances of extroverts and introverts has not been statistically significant.

Table 3: Results of t-test for sensing/intuitive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>95% Confidence interval of the difference</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensing/ Intuitive</td>
<td>-1.86 from -3.48 to -0.23</td>
<td>2.3431</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0.0297</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 3, P-value is smaller than 0.05. This indicates that the difference between the performances of sensing participants
and intuitive participants has been statistically significant.

**Table 4: Results of t-test for thinking/feeling**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Paired Differences M1-M2</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thinking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 4, P-value is larger than 0.05. This indicates that the difference between the performances of thinking participants and feeling participants has not been statistically significant.

**Table 5: Results of t-test for judging/perceiving**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Paired Differences M1-M2</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Judging</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceiving</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In Table 5, P-value is smaller than 0.05. This indicates that the difference between the performances of judging participants and perceiving participants has been statistically significant.

**5. Discussion**

As was mentioned in the results, in two pairs of personality groups, no significant difference was found between the scores of contrasting personality groups. These results were in accordance with Gan (2011) who found that there is no significant correlation between extraversion/introversion and L2 learners’ oral performance. And also reaffirmed Soleimani, Jafariogohar, and Ramezani’s (2013) study, they found no significant correlation between extraversion / introversion and the performance on multiple-choice and true false tests. On the other hand, intuitive participants performed significantly better than sensing participants, and perceiving participants were significantly more successful than judging participants. In other words, in the two pairs of sensing/intuitive and judging/perceiving, there was a significant difference between the performances of contrasting personality groups in the listening test. This finding contradicts with Yazdani Fazlabadi and Khatin Zadeh (2016) they claimed that sensing and thinking learners were relatively more successful in cloze passage tasks, though the task they examined was not listening.

The question raised here is that why in these two particular types of pairs the performances of participants were different? Why did intuitive participants perform better than sensing participants? Why did perceiving participants perform better than judging participants? It might be said that some specific characteristics of intuitive and perceiving people put them in a stronger position in this particular type of listening test.

As was mentioned in the introductory parts of this article, there are some features that distinguish intuitive people from sensing ones. While intuitive are speculative and hunching, sensing people are realistic and experience-oriented. This might be one of the differences that make the performance of intuitive people better. Because of its nature, listening for minimal pairs is a test that requires listeners to be good speculaters. The listener has to react promptly to a stimulus that takes place in a very short period of time. High reliance on information received through the senses might be a weakness for sensing people in this type of listening. This characteristic might function as an inhibitor for listeners to provide a prompt reaction in response to a rapid stimulus.

Another distinguishing characteristic between these two groups is that intuitive people are open to possibilities while sensing people are oriented toward actualities. Being open to possible alternatives could play a significant role in the success of intuitive people in listening for minimal pairs. On the other hand, sensing people restrict themselves to a limited set of actual or highly-possible options. Generally, it seems that considering a large set of possibilities and not being restricted by a limited set of options are important features that improve the performance of intuitive people in listening for minimal pairs.

The data given in Table 5 indicates that perceiving participants performed better than judging ones. When we look at the distinguishing characteristics of judging and perceiving people, we might be able to explain the better performance of perceiving participants in listening test. As was mentioned, perceiving people are flexible and open. On the other hand, judging people are settled and decided. While perceiving people are flexible and adapt as they go, judging people are fixed and plan ahead. All of these differences suggest that perceiving people can adapt to the pressure of a listening test that requires the test-taker to be flexible and open.
options. Listening for minimal pairs is a test in which the test-taker has to be a flexible decision-maker rather than being fixed and settled. In other words, adaptability and tentativeness make perceiving people more prepared for this type of listening test. On the other hand, decisiveness could be a weakness for judging people in tests of this nature.

To sum up, results obtained in this study suggest that some personality traits might have a noticeable impact on the performance of test-takers in listening for minimal pairs. However, it should not be ignored that cognitive processes involved in listening are very complex and a very long list of factors might interact with each other throughout the process of listening. Personality traits might be just one small part of these influential factors. Depending on the nature and requirements of the listening test, some factors might become more important. Therefore, it can be said that it is the nature of listening test that determines which factor is more important in the performance of test-takers. If a complete picture of these complex processes is going to be presented, all of these factors must be included at the same time. This is a question that can be met in future research projects.

6. Conclusion

Results obtained in this study indicated that personality traits of people might have some kind of impact on their performance in listening for minimal pairs. In the two pairs of sensing/intuitive and judging/perceiving, a significant difference was observed between the performances of contrasting personality groups. In this study, intuitive participants performed better than sensing ones, and judging participants performed better than perceiving ones. On the other hand, no significant difference was found between the performances of contrasting personality groups in the two pairs of extrovert/introvert and thinking/feeling. Flexibility and adaptability to the context of listening test were suggested to be key factors in the success of intuitive and perceiving participants. It was proposed that those listeners who are open to a larger set of possible options perform better in listening for minimal pairs. However, the influence of a large set of other factors that have some kind of impact on the performance of listeners is a question that cannot be ignored. There might be a large number of interacting factors that influence the performance of people throughout listening test. Depending on the type of listening test, some of these factors might play a more significant role compared to other competing factors. A comprehensive study must include as many as influential factors. It is a question that has to be addressed in future studies.

References


