Issues in Second Language Listening Comprehension and the Pedagogical Implications

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ABSTRACT

Listening is an important language skill to develop in terms of second language acquisition (SLA). In spite of its importance, second language (L2) learners often regard listening as the most difficult language skill to learn. This paper reviews a variety of recent research on listening comprehension to provide a basis for creating more effective listening instruction. It begins with a brief discussion of listening processes for comprehension and acquisition, followed by reviewing cognitive research, linguistic research and affective research on listening comprehension, and discusses implications of teaching L2 listening for comprehension and acquisition. The paper concludes that current research on listening comprehension has revealed the importance of metacognitive knowledge, lexical knowledge and prosodic cues including stress and intonation as well as reducing anxiety in the development listening comprehension.

INTRODUCTION

Listening comprehension is at the heart of language learning. Learners want to understand second language (L2) speakers and want to comprehend a variety of L2 multimedia such as DVDs and the Internet. At the same time, listening is an important language skill to develop in terms of second language acquisition (SLA) (Dunkel, 1991; Rost, 2001; Vandergrift, 2007). SLA studies have demonstrated that comprehensible input is critical for language acquisition as well as comprehensible output (Swain, 1995). Rost (2001) mentions that "a key difference between more successful and less successful acquirers relates in large part to their ability to use listening as a means of acquisition" (p. 94).

In spite of its importance, L2 learners often regard listening as the most difficult language skill to learn (Hasan, 2000; Graham, 2003). As Vandergrift (2007) points out, one of the reasons might be that learners are not taught how to learn listening effectively. A narrow focus on the correct answer to comprehension questions that are often given in a lesson does little to help learners understand and control the process leading to comprehension. When learners listen to spoken English, they need to perceive and segment the incoming stream of speech in order to make sense of it. The listener cannot refer back to the text in contrast to a reader who usually has the opportunity to refer back to clarify understanding. Moreover, as Stahr (2009) asserts, "spoken language is characterized by assimilation as well as unclear articulation, and

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lexical units are not necessarily as clearly marked as in written text; this lack of clarity of spoken language makes word segmentation an extremely difficult task for L2 listeners" (p. 582). Consequently, listening can become a cause of anxiety for L2 learners (Elkhafaifi, 2005). Noro (2006) examines the psychological reality of the construct of "listening stress" introduced as an alternative to listening anxiety by questionnaire and oral interviews with Japanese college students. He concludes that "the difficulties were some sort of 'stressor' to them" (p.64).

   How do L2 learners understand spoken English or fail to understand it? To investigate the listening comprehension process can provide useful insights into teaching listening. To know why students may find the listening comprehension task difficult may also provide us with opportunities to alter listening exercises into more effective ones. Learners who learn to control their listening processes can enhance their comprehension. Developing listening comprehension ability would enable the learners to succeed in L2 acquisition in terms of increasing comprehensible input. In addition, appropriate instruction for L2 listening could reduce learners' anxiety. As a result, since learners' self confidence in listening comprehension will be enhanced, they will be motivated to access spoken English including conversations with L2 speakers, DVDs and the Internet.

   Adding to the fact that learners recognize listening as the most difficult skill to learn, it is said that L2 listening remains the least researched of all four language skills (Vandergrift, 2007). In spite of being the least researched skill, L2 listening studies have addressed various issues; for example, cognitive issues such as bottom-up processes and top-down processes; linguistic issues such as linguistic factors that contribute to listening comprehension, for example lexis and phonology, and affective issues such as motivation and anxiety in listening have all been investigated. Findings in research on those various issues could be applied to L2 listening methodology. It may be significant to review a variety of recent research to provide a basis for creating more effective listening instruction.

   In this review, major current issues in the literature on L2 listening comprehension and teaching listening will be explored. First, clarification of listening processes for comprehension and acquisition will be given. Then, a review of recent cognitive research, linguistic research, and affective research will be explored. Finally implications of teaching L2 listening for comprehension and for acquisition will be discussed.

LISTENING PROCESSES FOR COMPREHENSION AND ACQUISITION

   One basic understanding held by SLA researchers is that, as input is converted into intake, learners make use of listening for two purposes: comprehension and acquisition. Namely, the L2 listening process has the two overlapping purposes (Sun, 2008). Learners have the natural inclination to decode linguistic input for successful communication. Nevertheless, not everything that is understood at the message level necessarily contributes to the learner's language development. In other words, not all input becomes intake (Corder, 1967).

   According to VanPatten (1996), it would appear that only a very small subset

of input ever becomes intake that has a permanent effect on the learners' acquisition of the L2. Schmidt (1990), who has drawn attention to the role of noticing in language learning, asserts that we will not learn anything from the input we hear and understand unless we notice something about it. Schmidt and Frota (1986) found that there was a close connection between noticing features of the input, and their later emergence in speech. However, it is plausible that comprehension is prerequisite to acquisition. VanPatten (1994) proposes that, in the early stages of acquiring a language, the learner's main objective is to establish meaning at all costs. This takes considerable effort, leaving little attention spare for the actual form of lexicon that is used. In other words, until learners feel comfortable with their ability to comprehend the message that is being imparted, they will not be ready to pay attention to, and to learn from, the language that is used to put the message across.

It has been said that it is important for teachers to understand the distinction between comprehension and acquisition in listening. The two views of listening lead in different directions for classroom pedagogy (Richards, 2005). Rost (2001) points out that "particularly for adult learners, the processes of learning to listen (that is, learning to understand spoken messages) and listening to learn (that is, learning the syntax and lexis of the language through listening) do not coincide" (p. 97). Learning to listen involves enhancing comprehension abilities in understanding the language process. On the other hand, listening to learn involves creating new meaning and form linking and then repeating the meaning and form linking, which helps the learners to be ready for paying more attention to the syntax and lexis of the language through listening. It seems significant that teachers view developing listening skills as one of the most important approach to enhancing language acquisition. As Rost (2001) mentions, "the optimal goal of L2 listening development is to allow for the L2 to be acquired through listening, not only to allow the learner to understand spoken messages in the L2" (p. 91).

CURRENT COGNITIVE RESEARCH ON LISTENING COMPREHESION

Recent cognitive research has provided us with a better understanding of the listening comprehension process. Understanding spoken language is essentially an inferential process (Rost, 2001). Many researchers in SLA have paid attention to both top-down processing and bottom-up processing in listening comprehension. Top-down processing refers to the use of background knowledge in understanding the meaning of a message. Bottom-up processing, on the other hand, refers to using the incoming input as the basis for understanding the message. Combinations of top-down processing with bottom-up processing of information from the stimulus itself are used. Linguistic knowledge and world knowledge interact in parallel fashion as listeners create a mental representation of what they have heard (Hulstijin, 2003). Thus, it is generally agreed that top-down and bottom-up processes continuously interact to make sense of spoken input (Vandergrift, 2007). For instance, it is possible to understand the meaning of a word before decoding its sound, because we have many different types of knowledge, including knowledge of the world around us. We know what normally happens, and so we have expectations about what we will hear. Moreover, Buck (2001) mentions "while we are listening, we almost always have some hypothesis about what is likely to come

next" (p. 3). Significantly, L2 learners, who have limited processing ability with less linguistic knowledge will depend on their ability to make use of all the available resources to interpret what they hear by top-down processes. Metacognitive knowledge is useful to develop rapid word recognition ability, because the learners make use of context and other compensatory strategies to make sense of the aural form of a word (Vandergrift, 2006). Therefore, it is generally agreed that strategies to use compensatory mechanisms - contextual, visual or paralinguistic information, world knowledge, cultural information and common sense while listening – will determine the degree of listening success (Vandergrift, 2007). Thus, the findings in research on top-down and bottom-up processes have provided listening methodologies called the top-down process approach and bottom-up process approach. For example, according to Richards (2008), a top-down process approach includes exercises that require top-down processing develop the learners' ability to use key words to construct the schema of a discourse, infer the setting for a text and infer the role of the participants and their goals. A bottom-up approach includes exercises that develop bottom-up processing, which helps learners to recognize word and clause divisions, recognize key words and recognize key transitions in a discourse.

In cognitive psychology, however, Anderson (2009) provides another model of language comprehension different from the current framework of the top-down and bottom-up processes. He breaks down the language comprehension process into three stages: perception, parsing and utilization. The first stage involves the perceptual process that encodes the spoken message; the second stage is the parsing stage, in which the words in the message are transformed into a mental representation of the combined meaning of the words. Listeners are involved in the identification of constituent structure or a basic phrase, or unit in a sentence's surface structure. The third stage is the utilization stage, in which listeners use the mental representation of the sentence's meaning. If the sentence is a question, they may answer; if it is an instruction, they may obey. These three stages are by necessity partly ordered in time; however, they also partly overlap. Listeners can make inferences from the first part of a sentence while they perceive a later part. Although the current framework of top-down and bottom-up processes has helped us to investigate pedagogical approaches to enhance linguistic knowledge and non-linguistic knowledge such as metacognitive knowledge, Anderson's (2009) model might provide us with a different perspective on the listening comprehension process and the listening instruction. Namely, learners' listening comprehension processes might be enhanced by their perception skill, parsing skill and utilization skill, and exercises focusing developing each skill in each stage could enhance their comprehension.

Next, research focusing on the differences between more-skilled and less-skilled L2 learners in regulating the top-down and the bottom-up processes has provided ample evidence of the importance of metacognitive strategies to L2 listening success (Vandergrift, 2003, 2007; Goh, 2008). In Vandergrift's (2003) study of adolescent learners of French, skilled listeners reported using about twice as many metacognitive strategies as their less-skilled counterparts. However, there are some arguments whether strategy instruction improves learners' listening. Ridgway (2000) argued that learners do not have the cognitive capacity to consciously activate taught strategies and listen simultaneously. In addition, Field (1998) pointed out that listening strategies instruction may promote the use of those strategies but may not necessarily

lead to improved listening. Despite the pedagogical and theoretical arguments, there has been little associated empirical research conducted. Cross (2009) investigated the effectiveness of metacognitive strategies instruction for fifteen Japanese advanced-level learners. However, the result did not indicate a significant difference between the experimental group and the control group. The effectiveness of teaching metacognitive strategies should be further investigated.

Some researchers have found that listening support in tasks can enhance the learners' use of metacognitive strategies in listening comprehension. Chang and Read (2006) investigated the effect of listening support on the listening performance of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. They found that various listening tasks influenced test takers' listening strategies by varying degrees as well as their listening performance. The results showed that the most effective type of support was providing information about the topic, followed by repetition of the input. Vocabulary instruction was the least useful form of support. It can be said that listening support, metacognitive strategies use and listening performance might have a significant relationship. Chang (2008) investigated listening supports with different variables of participants' proficiency levels. The result shows that previewing questions (PQ) had a greater effect on strategy use than other types of support; PQ was more effective for higher level learners than lower level learners because of their different reading skills. Repeated input (RI) worked less effectively for learners with limited language knowledge. Providing topic preparation (TP) was useful for both higher and lower leveled learners. Vocabulary instruction (VI) was the least effective for both. Chang (2008) concludes that PQ can have positive and negative effects on listeners' strategy use. On the positive side, PQ may reveal content cues and thus encourage listeners to predict possible information and to be more selective than listening for everything. The negative aspect is that the PQ may encourage some learners to approach the discourse by focusing on linguistic cues and ignoring the main focus. According to Chang's (2008) analysis, RI may influence affective strategies as well as cognitive ones. TP allows learners to listen for detailed information because the topics were known. VI allows learners to try to translate what is heard into the first language (L1). Too much focus on linguistic information causes less of a top-down approach. As Vandergrift (1997) mentioned, a successful listener must resist the temptation to translate the input. Thus, listening support should be selected according to the learners' proficiency level and the effectiveness of the top-down process.

Another important cognitive issue is about the contribution of L1 listening comprehension ability. Vandergrift's (2006) study reported that L1 listening ability and L2 proficiency together could explain about 39% of the common variance in L2 listening ability, with L2 proficiency explaining about 25% and L1 listening ability about 14%. The result showed similarity to the result in reading research that had been found before the listening research. Namely, L2 proficiency and L1 listening ability together play a role in successful L2 listening. The result seems to imply the important role of metacognitive knowledge; because L2 listeners need not only L2 linguistic competence but also metacognitive knowledge that is relevant to L1 listening. Thus, recent cognitive research has revealed it is significant to allow learners to activate metacognitive strategies as top-down processes.

CURRENT LINGUISTIC RESEARCH ON LISTENING COMPREHENSION

Research has investigated the linguistic knowledge that contributes to listening comprehension: phonology, lexis, syntax, semantics and discourse structure (Buck, 2001). Linguistic knowledge, which can be implicit or explicit, is used for linguistic cues to understand spoken English (Anderson, 2009). Lexical knowledge is more explicit, while prosody and syntax might be rather implicit.

First, researchers have been interested in how much lexical knowledge contributes to comprehension. The size of vocabulary knowledge that is needed for satisfactory comprehension of spoken text has been investigated. Nation (2006) asserts: if we take 98% as the ideal coverage, an 8,000–9,000 word-family vocabulary is needed for dealing with written text, and 6,000–7,000 families for dealing with spoken text while the first 1,000 plus proper nouns cover 78%–81% of written text, and around 85% of spoken text. Clearly, spoken language makes slightly greater use of high-frequency words of the language than written language does. Stahr (2009) found that vocabulary size and depth of vocabulary knowledge are both significantly correlated with listening comprehension and asserts that vocabulary size is the basic component of vocabulary knowledge in listening comprehension and that depth of vocabulary knowledge does not play a separate role.

Stahr (2009) also concluded that the results suggest that a lexical coverage of 98% is needed to cope effectively with the transitory nature of spoken language. Learners who mastered the 5,000 word families that provide them with 98% lexical coverage achieved a score of 72.9% in the listening comprehension test. The 10,000 vocabulary level that results in 99.27% lexical coverage of the text achieved a score of 80% in the comprehension test. However, the score of a listening comprehension test is generally lower than in a reading comprehension test when the same lexical coverage is given. That might be caused by the fact that spoken language has a real time acoustic nature. It could be that a word, which can be recognized in its written form, will not be recognized in its spoken form. The findings from lexical coverage research provide us with evidence that vocabulary knowledge largely contributes to listening comprehension, at the same time the difficulty of word perception in spoken texts might cause the difficulty of comprehension even though the lexical coverage is enough. It seems therefore significant to select appropriate leveled spoken texts for learners according to the learners' lexical knowledge in teaching listening comprehension.

Secondly, acoustic input such as phonological modification and prosody has been studied as an important factor for L2 learner's word perception. Much of the focus of attention has been on how the phonology of L1 constrains the perception of L2 at the phoneme level (Field, 2008). For example, in Altenberg's (2005) study, the results indicated that learners are significantly worse than native speakers at using acoustic phonetic cues, and that some types of stimuli are easier for learners to identify than others. The findings suggest that various factors, including transfer and markedness, may be relevant to success in L2 segmentation.

However, more attention has been paid to stress and intonation patterns. In English, the stress and intonation is not indistinct or missing even in very fast speech (Buck, 2001). Listeners use stress and intonation as important cues to comprehend the meaning of text. Speakers stress what they think is important, and the most important

words; those that express the core meaning, get additional stress. Also, English intonation patterns are closely related to the structure and meaning of the text (Buck, 2001). For example, intonation indicates clausal boundaries, questions, and when it is appropriate for the listeners to respond. The intonation pattern might be relevant to the identification of the constituent structure or a basic phrase or unit in a sentence's surface structure in the parsing stage in Anderson's (2009) model. And also, Conversation Analysis research supports those linguistic findings; native English listeners use intonation as a resource to project the possible completion of a turn-constructional unit (Wong & Waring, 2010). This seems relevant to the utilization stage in Anderson's (2009) model.

Moreover, stress is importantly used to listen to content words differently from function words. L1 listeners exploit the perceptual difference between stressed syllables, which occur almost exclusively in content words, and unstressed syllables, which often correspond to monosyllabic, weak quality function words (Grosjean & Gee, 1987). Eastman (1993) produced evidence that L2 learners face an important obstacle in distinguishing content words and function words when their L1 does not resemble English rhythmically. He suggests that speakers of what are traditionally called syllable-timed languages such as Japanese are at a disadvantage compared with those who speak stress-timed languages.

However, the recent study by Field (2008) revealed that English function words are identified significantly less accurately by L2 listeners, regardless of level or L1, than are content words. From the result, he argued neither learner's unfamiliarity with English phonology nor L1's rhythmic characteristics might be the main cause. He concluded that it might depend on the way in which the L2 listener chooses to distribute his or her attention. Thus, the evidence suggests that the linguistic foundation on which learners base hypotheses about a speaker's meaning is likely to consist principally of content words; according to Field (2008) "function words are likely to be missing or only approximately matched, even among some higher level learners" (p. 428).

The importance of grammar knowledge for listening has been less explored, although there is a range of research arguing that there may be a strong relation between grammar and reading (Grabe, 2004). In cognitive psychology, Anderson (2009) asserts that knowledge of the structure of English allows us to grasp the meaning of a sentence in the comprehension process. However, Mecartty (2000) states that grammatical knowledge does not contribute significantly to either listening or reading comprehension but vocabulary knowledge plays the important role in L2 listening comprehension ability. VanPatten (1990) revealed that learners, in particular early stage learners, have difficulty in attending to both form and content in listening. As Field (2008) concluded that function words were not paid attention to when people listen, it seems reasonable to argue that since function words were more relevant to grammar knowledge while content words were more relevant to lexical meaning. It might be impossible to divide into lexical knowledge and grammar knowledge since listeners might combine both syntactic and semantic cues in interpreting the sentence.

These findings in recent linguistic research make it clear that vocabulary knowledge is an important predictor for listening comprehension; listeners are likely to pay attention to content words, stress and intonation rather than function words and grammar in bottom-up processing. However, there is less research about grammar, syntax cues or constituent structure. It seems significant to investigate how linguistic

knowledge plays a role as a listener's cue in listening comprehension. Findings in conversation analysis research might be helpful for further investigation.

CURRENT AFFECTIVE RESEARCH ON LISTENING COMPREHENSION

Alongside cognitive and linguistic factors, affective factors also significantly influence listening comprehension. Many researchers have revealed that affective variables play a large role in the learners' performance. As analyzed by Buck (2001), there are numerous difficulties to be encountered in listening comprehension tasks, such as unknown vocabulary, unfamiliar topics, fast speech rates, and unfamiliar accents (Chang & Read, 2008).

Elkhafaifi's (2005) study examined the effect of general foreign language learning anxiety on students' achievement in an Arabic course and of listening anxiety on students' listening comprehension. The result indicates that foreign language learning anxiety and listening anxiety are separate but related phenomena that both correlated negatively with achievement. The study suggested that reducing student anxiety and providing a less stressful classroom environment might help students improve both their listening comprehension proficiency as well as their overall course performance. Thus, the listening process is easily disrupted by anxiety and separately, listening tasks themselves may cause listening anxiety.

Noro (2006) clarifies the nature of listening anxiety by the qualitative analysis of the data obtained both by questionnaire and oral interviews with Japanese college students. He finds the main sources of listening difficulties are rate of speech, vocabulary and pronunciation. Coping strategies in response to listening difficulties include asking for help, guessing, grasping the outline and changing attitudes to pay attention to the next word or phrase or not to worry too much. Affective reactions in the face of the listening difficulties are irritation, lack of concentration, aversion, sense of resignation and loss of self-confidence. Thus, L2 learners must clearly realize the listening anxiety which comes from listening difficulty in speech recognition and the need to use coping strategies.

Recent studies have investigated a possible relationship between listening tasks and listening anxiety. Chang (2008) found that listening supports reduced learners' anxiety on listening tests. Chang and Read (2008) further investigated the effects of four types of listening support in terms of reducing the negative effects of listening anxiety with proficiency variables. The results showed at higher proficiency level, the VI group was noticeably more anxious than the RI and TP groups, while at the lower level, the PQ and VI groups had significantly higher anxiety than the RI and TP subgroups. The test scores showed that topic preparation (TP) and repeated input (RI) were more effective than giving vocabulary input (VI) or allowing previews of the questions (PQ).

In interviews after the test, the participants gave four main reasons for their anxiety before they took the test: firstly, most people reported listening only once, secondly, concern about the mark they would obtain, third, worrying that the test would be very difficult for them as compared to other students in the class, fourth, lack of confidence. The higher-proficiency students in the TP group and lower-proficiency students in the RI group felt less anxious after the task; however, the lower students in

the PQ group were the only subgroup that felt more anxious after the task. There was no significant difference between pre-task and post-task anxiety in the rest of the groups. Thus, the results indicated that different types of listening support affect learners' listening performance differently, and a metacognitive approach is likely to be effective to reduce listening anxiety.

Motivation is another important affective issue in research because listening is an active process, requiring both conscious attention and involvement (Rost, 2001). There is some evidence for a positive relationship between motivation, use of metacognitive strategies and listening success (Vandergrift, 2005). Students who indicated high levels of motivation appeared to engage in listening behaviors that were more metacognitive in nature. "Motivation and metacognition appear to be elements that are part of clusters of variables contributing to variance in L2 listening" (Vandergrift, 2007, p. 196). Kemp's (2010) study about motivating autonomous learning showed how keeping a listening log motivated learners to engage with and reflect on their experiences as potential learning situations. Listening to what learners want to listen to and want to try to comprehend might motivate them to listen with more metacognitive strategies and to keep on learning. He pointed out keeping a listening log enables learners to notice their language development enhanced by developing schemata, metacognitive awareness, motivation and involvement in understanding.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING LISTENING FOR COMPREHENSION

Findings in recent cognitive research provide us with implications for second language listening-pedagogy. One is the importance of metacognitive knowledge and the other is the application of Anderson's (2009) three-stage framework in the comprehension process. Metacognitive knowledge is the key to improve comprehension. While it is still unclear if listening strategies instruction has immediate effectiveness as Cross's (2009) research indicated, Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari's (2010) research showed evidence that metacognitive instruction make a significant difference in final comprehension measure. Less skilled listeners in the experimental group would make greater gains than more skilled listeners. Instead of teaching metacognitive knowledge, we can use certain listening support which is effective in allowing learners to use metacognitive strategies. Providing topical background and repeated input help the most to promote the use of metacognitive knowledge while vocabulary input is the least helpful since it allows listeners to focus on bottom-up processing too much (Chang, 2008). Also, a metacognitive approach is effective to reduce anxiety.

Besides the teaching framework of top-down skills and bottom-up skills, Anderson's (2009) comprehension model in cognitive psychology is likely to provide a new methodological framework: perception skill, parsing skill, and utilization skill. The findings regarding the three stages imply that listening instruction can focus on improving control ability in each stage.

Next, findings in linguistic research provide us with methodological implications about the importance of teaching vocabulary, rhythmic cues and L2 listening as comprehension. Vocabulary knowledge is a critical predictor of listening comprehension. Although vocabulary input as a listening support is not as effective as,

for example, providing background on the topic, the listener's vocabulary knowledge plays an important role in bottom-up processing. According to Nation (2006), mastering more than the most frequent 6,000 word families seems an appropriate goal for L2 learners to comprehend spoken language. The most frequent 1,000 word families that can cover 85% of spoken text might not be sufficient for deep comprehension. Since unknown vocabulary causes listening anxiety (Noro, 2006; Chang & Reed, 2008), teachers need to choose appropriate listening text matched by learner's size of vocabulary. Stahr (2009) proposes that at least 98% lexical coverage of the spoken text is needed for listeners to comprehend it. If the instruction focuses on developing comprehension skills, such as practicing word recognition and use of the metacognitive knowledge, the spoken text, which contains only known vocabulary, might be effective. Second, it seems significant to teach learners to pay attention to the rhythmic cues such as stress and intonation, because they remain important even in very fast speech where the phoneme might be indistinct or missing. Therefore, when vocabulary instruction is given, learners need to notice the phonological features including stress so that they can identify the word or the phrase in spoken form.

In addition, dictation is an effective bottom-up approach for improving L2 listening performance. Kiany and Shiramiry (2002) investigated the effect of frequent dictation on the listening comprehension ability of elementary EFL learners. Results indicated that dictation did have a significant effect on the listening comprehension ability of the experimental group. The study proposed probable reasons: dictation could force learners to listen more attentively to decode the foreign speech. Dictation could strengthen learners' memory to keep one chunk of meaningful speech in their mind until they could write it on paper. Dictation is a good task to learn phonological features such as cues and also to identify constituent structure, which is an important skill in the parsing stage.

Especially for lower proficiency learners, dictation helps learners' comprehension by paying more attention to content words that convey meaning. The current practice of listening out for key words seems to be justified by Field's (2008) study. He provided the following implications:

> In the early stages of listening development, learners should be asked to build a general and sometimes approximate meaning representation on the basis of the more prominent content words in the text; however, as listening competence improves, instructors might move on from meanings to forms that can be applied to teaching listening. (p. 428)

Finally, findings in affective research show the importance of reducing listening anxiety in listening instruction. Difficulties associated with rate of speech, lexical features and pronunciation are the main sources of stress. If the appropriate instruction improves learners' speech perception skills and use of metacognitive strategies, listening anxiety can be reduced. Reducing listening anxiety will play a positive effect on accurate assessment as well as improving listening. It is important for teachers to design a listening comprehension test in a way that enables learners to demonstrate their ability by reducing the effects of anxiety as much as possible. Chang and Read's (2008) study on the relationship between listening support and listening anxiety suggests that providing topical knowledge and repeated input are effective in reducing listening anxiety as well as allowing the learners to use metacognitive

knowledge. This field should be studied more in order to develop listening tasks which lower anxiety as well as measure learners' real listening comprehension ability.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING LISTENING FOR ACQUISITION

The other goal of developing listening is to allow learners to acquire the L2. Teachers need to consider teaching listening in order to promote learners' acquisition as well as comprehension. The implications for teaching listening for acquisition in terms of cumulative listening activity, meaningful communicative activities, and autonomous learning will now be discussed. Kemp (2010) suggests that cumulative meaningful listening activities might be important for listening for acquisition. He reported that through using a listening log, the learners developed independent learning skills, including the ability to monitor their performance, and make decisions and act upon them. He argues that "what has been learnt may not be evident after one listening event; instead, the effect is likely to be cumulative" (p. 386). L2 learners restructure linguistic knowledge and create new schemata on an unfamiliar culture through cumulative listening experiences. More attention needs to be paid to the cumulative listening effect for acquisition. To support this, Schmitt (2008) suggests that establishing the meaning-form link is essential for vocabulary instruction, and once this initial meaning-form link is established, it is crucial to consolidate it with repeated exposures and it is best learned by being exposed to the lexical item many times in many different contexts. This means listening to targeted lexical items many times in many different contexts helps learners' language acquisition.

Next, learners need to be encouraged to participate more in communicative activities which could enhance learning opportunities through increased input and output that are required to promote acquisition. Richards (2005) claims that input can best serve as the basis for intake when it includes features not already in the learners' linguistic repertoire and which are at an appropriate difficulty level for the learners' communicative needs. He suggests that "learners need to take part in activities which require them to try out and experiment in using newly noticed language forms in order for new learning items to become incorporated into their linguistic repertoire" (p. 89). To prevent conversation breakdown, it is helpful for the learners to learn repair practices. Wong and Waring (2010) also wrote that "teaching *repair practices*, ways of addressing problems in speaking, hearing, or understanding of the talk, might help learners to listen to learn" (p. 212). If learners are taught repair practices, they can negotiate meaning by using repair practices and be encouraged to take part in L2 conversation with less anxiety.

Finally, learners, especially advanced ones, need to be encouraged to be independent learners who are able to exploit the potential learning situation. Listening comprehension skill plays an important role in autonomous learning. Field (2007) argues:

> True learner empowerment consists of the freedom to learn outside the teaching context and the ability to continue learning after instruction has finished; instead of creating instruction dependent learners, we need to design programmes that both equip students for the world beyond the

classroom and enable them to extract linguistic information from the
resources which an L2-rich environment provides. (p. 37)

Nowadays, learners can easily access L2 environments through the Internet, DVDs and
other multimedia even in an EFL context. It is significant for teachers to recognize that
developing listening comprehension skill is not the final goal for the learners but the
foundation for becoming independent learners.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, current research on listening comprehension has revealed the
importance of metacognitive knowledge in the top-down process as well as lexical
knowledge and prosodic cues including stress and intonation in the bottom-up process.
It has also clarified the negative effect of anxiety on learners' performance. Especially,
teaching metacognitive knowledge is the key to improving listening comprehension as
well as reducing anxiety. Also, cognitive research findings about the three stages in the
language comprehension process provide us with a new framework of perception,
parsing and utilization and the important cues that listeners utilize. However, more
research on the effectiveness of metacognitive instruction and linguistic cues in the
three stages should be conducted.

It might be necessary to view listening for comprehension as different from
listening for acquisition. However, it seems that current listening instruction seems to be
mixed with both learning to listen and listening to learn. For example, it seems that
learners often listen to spoken texts that include many unknown words for them. Since
there is a large impact of vocabulary knowledge on comprehension, adequate
vocabulary coverage of listening material might need to be considered. Low vocabulary
coverage might lead learners to listening anxiety. Learners might be able to learn how to
control the listening comprehension process more effectively by listening to texts
utilizing their linguistic repertoire than by listening to texts which include many new
words. Larger coverage of known vocabulary in spoken texts should be considered for
better listening comprehension instruction, which focuses on recognizing known
vocabulary and parsing sentences.

Listening comprehension is a prerequisite for acquisition. Teachers need to
allow the L2 to be acquired through listening, not only to allow the learner to
understand spoken messages in the L2. Cumulative meaningful listening activities and
communicative activities seem effective for acquisition. The final goal of developing
listening might be to enable learners to become autonomous learners. Appropriate
instruction for listening comprehension can reduce listening anxiety and provide a good
foundation for becoming autonomous learners who can utilize the listening process for
acquisition.

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