

# Listening Strategy Use and Linguistic Patterns in Listening Comprehension by EFL Learners

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This study mainly focused on investigating listening strategy uses at different proficiency levels for different linguistic patterns. Three main questions were examined in regards to Taiwanese listeners of English as a foreign language (EFL): (1) For listeners with different proficiency levels, which pattern may result in a higher level of listening comprehension when the negative, functional, and contrary-to-fact statements are used? (2) Are there any significant differences between item type and proficiency level? (3) What are the differences and frequency in listening strategy use reported by individual listeners? To explore the above issues, a quantitative research method was applied, including a self-perceived survey, a t-test technique, and an analysis of variance. Results of this study demonstrate that listeners with both advanced and beginning proficiency levels yielded higher scores on contrary-to-fact statements, followed by functional expression and then negative expression. Advanced proficiency listeners mostly used the combination of various strategies when listening to contrary-to-fact statements, while beginning-level listeners heavily employed memory strategies when listening to negative expression. Implications for EFL educators to recognize the directions of instructional practices for enhancing listening comprehension are presented.

## INTRODUCTION

In the past 10 years, much attention in second language learning research has been devoted to composing hypotheses and theories explaining crucial factors that may develop foreign language (FL) listening comprehension (Nagle & Sanders, 1986;

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Buck, 1991). Even though there is no generally accepted theory on FL listening comprehension development, a review of the literature on listening suggests that listeners' linguistic knowledge and background knowledge are the essential factors that could affect their understanding of the foreign language (Richards, 1983; Christine & Christa, 1995). In other words, to yield better performance for listening comprehension, listeners must at least possess the ability to recognize and master major FL patterns, as well as to activate all the schemata to make sense of the incoming information. However, for Taiwanese learners whose first language is based on a different phonological system, the message may not be understood, especially when listening to a conversation among native speakers of English; the Taiwanese listeners must discriminate between sounds, understand vocabulary and grammatical structures, interpret the language output at once, even though most of the time they have little cognizance of the topic and the sociocultural setting. As a result, listening seems to be a most frustrating experience for many Taiwanese learners (Chien & Wei, 1997). Nevertheless, researchers have argued that listening comprehension ability can be taught and trained by using appropriate strategies (Chien & Wei, 1997; Chien & Kao, 2004). However, how can listening strategies be most efficiently and effectively taught to help Taiwanese listeners of English store certain aspects of linguistic cues and activate the background knowledge to comprehend the listening text simultaneously?

As EFL educators, we need to explore how our Taiwanese students learn to listen to English and understand more the problems they have encountered in listening so that we can help them acquire better strategies. To get a clearer picture regarding Taiwanese listeners' perceptions of their listening problems in English and learn more about different levels of proficiency and listeners' use of specific strategies, this study employed three particular linguistic patterns—negative, functional, and contrary-to-fact statements—to analyze which pattern was the most difficult type for understanding English and which pattern might result in a higher level of listening comprehension. The reason for choosing these three patterns was that in the instructor's (who was also the researcher) teaching experiences, they were the most troublesome linguistic forms for most Taiwanese learners. In addition to these three linguistic forms, the frequency of the specific listening strategy use among individual EFL listeners was identified.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

As mentioned earlier, listening comprehension is a complex activity. Coordinating sounds, vocabulary, grammatical structures, and background knowledge involves a great deal of mental processes on the part of the listener (Vandergrift, 1999). Listening is even more difficult for the Taiwanese learners of English whose first language is based on a different rhythm and phoneme. That is, Chinese is a kind

of ideographic language that focuses on word-meanings, while English is an alphabetic language that focuses on phonemes (Hsieh, 1997). Although there are major differences between these two languages, a number of research studies demonstrate that listening ability can be taught, and EFL learners can gain positive effects both cognitively and linguistically from training in learning strategies (Huang, 2001; Chien & Wei, 1997; Chien & Kao, 2004). However, there is a great variation in the use of learning strategies among students with different levels of proficiency. Research shows that learners do have their own listening strategies, and there are some differences in what they do in order to comprehend the listening text (Oxford, 1993). Research reports view the comprehension process as an interaction between the listener's background knowledge and linguistic knowledge. Hildyard and Olson (1982) found that efficient listeners utilize background knowledge as an interactive base for text processing, while beginning-level listeners relate mostly to linguistic details. They found that efficient listeners are so successful at using their background knowledge to interpret the listening text that they do not successfully distinguish between the original text and implications they draw. O'Malley, Chamot, and Kupper (1989) demonstrated that effective EFL listeners use both top-down and bottom-up strategies to construct meaning, while ineffective listeners just determine the meanings of individual words. Wolff's (1987) study also indicated that data-driven processing is only fragmentary for efficient EFL listeners; instead, they activate more L1 knowledge in the form of concept-driven schemata. Besides, Shohamy's (1991) study found that listeners at the beginning level perform better on items referring to local cues than on items referring to global ones. The study done by Shang (2005) also demonstrated that lower-proficiency EFL listeners just concentrate on memorizing the insignificant linguistic details instead of emphasizing the whole comprehension. Such severe demands on the listeners' memory load may interfere with attending to the more relevant and important tasks in the text. Osada (2001) explained that beginner-level EFL listeners tend to adopt a mental translation approach to listening, so they cannot construct meaning when they process connected speech on a word-by-word basis only.

Based on the recent literature, it is found that beginning-level EFL listeners need to consciously focus on details of what they hear because they have limited language knowledge, so little of what they hear can be automatically processed (Vandergrift, 2004). To become an effective listener, Segalowitz and Segalowitz (1993) maintained that automatization of word recognition skills, that is, fluent bottom-up processing is critical for successful listening comprehension. However, due to the lack of grammatical knowledge and vocabulary, word recognition skills of ineffective EFL listeners are not yet fully automatized (Meccarty, 2000). Jensen and Hansen (1995) pointed out that it does not mean that listeners with a lower level of proficiency do not use content schemata for global understanding; however, they may not select appropriate schemata. "Selecting appropriate

schemata depends on having a successful and somewhat automatic interaction between the input, linguistic knowledge and world knowledge in order to construct the larger units of meaning and to comprehend the discourse” (p. 102). On the other hand, listeners with a higher level of proficiency can successfully “decode the input, interpret the semantic content and integrate the new information into his or her own knowledge system” (p. 102), in order to comprehend a message. To be more successful listeners, Bacon (1992a) maintained that listeners should employ a greater number and range of listening strategies; listeners should be flexible in changing strategies to meet the task and be motivated to understand the oral message.

However, other researchers (Reinking & Schreiner, 1985) proposed that higher proficiency listeners may profit from certain strategies, but may not necessarily have a greater repertoire. Defilippis (1980) reported that the total number of strategies used by two proficiency groups of research subjects is nearly equal. The skillful listeners often use keywords, inferences from context, and grammatical knowledge to help comprehension; the unskillful listeners mainly use keywords, translations, and grammatical knowledge, but they rarely use inferences from context. Shang’s (2005) study supported such finding, showing that items referring to the inference questions are the most difficult item type for the lower-proficiency listeners because it is not easy for them to draw conclusions from the information given by the speakers. O’Malley, Chamot, and Kupper’s (1989) study that focused on the mental processes that EFL learners use in listening comprehension, the strategies they use in different phases of comprehension (i.e., perceptual processing, parsing, and utilization), and the differences in strategy use between the effective and ineffective listeners also indicated that it is not the greater number of strategies but rather the frequency and type of strategies listeners use. O’Malley et al. point out that the three predominant strategies which differentiate effective listeners from ineffective listeners are self-monitoring, inferencing from context, and elaboration. Oxford (1990) further grouped those strategies into three direct strategies: memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies, as well as three indirect strategies: metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Since listening is a complex mental process, in the present study, only three direct strategies were considered to evaluate how Taiwanese learners of English dealt with the listening process in a variety of specific linguistic patterns.

### Purpose of the Study

Based on the research studies above, it is found that there is some variation in the frequency and use of listening strategies among effective and ineffective listeners. Although contemporary comprehension theory has demonstrated that listening strategies (e.g., using keywords, inferencing from context, translating) play important roles in resulting in a higher level of comprehension, there are substantially

few experimental studies undertaken to analyze listeners' understanding of particular linguistic patterns, as well as the specific strategies they use in listening to English conversation. To determine whether the presence of the particular patterns and the frequency of listening strategy use affect listeners' understanding, three linguistic patterns—negative, functional, and contrary-to-fact statements—were chosen to compare which pattern might result in higher level of listening comprehension. To explore this issue, the following questions were addressed:

1. For listeners with different levels of proficiency, which pattern may result in a higher level of listening comprehension when the negative, functional, and contrary-to-fact statements are used?
2. Are there any significant differences between item type and proficiency level on listening comprehension performance?
3. What are the differences and frequency in listening strategy use reported by different proficiency listeners?

To explore the issues above, a comparison of three linguistic patterns was examined to see which pattern yielded higher scores on English for conversational purposes of listening-proficiency exam. To do so, listeners' performance on the short dialogues in the listening comprehension section of the simulated TOEFL test (Test of English as a Foreign Language) was employed and compared. In addition, a self-perceived survey was administered to examine how often Taiwanese EFL listeners used the specific listening strategy in answering the test items. Hopefully, the research results can help EFL educators and classroom teachers better understand the influences of particular linguistic patterns on listening comprehension and further help EFL listeners use various listening strategies more effectively in order to develop their listening ability.

## METHODOLOGY

### Subjects

This study mainly focused on investigating the listening strategy use at different proficiency levels for different linguistic patterns. Subjects in the present study were 97 sophomores in the Applied English Department enrolled in a listening class at XX University in Taiwan. The subjects ranged from 19 to 26 years old, with a mean age of 20.5. A demographic questionnaire was administered to gather information about the subjects' backgrounds. Results from the questionnaires showed that all of the subjects had experienced formal instruction in English for an average of 6.4 years by the time they came to study at the university. Eighty-three percent of the subjects did various kinds of practices to improve their

English listening proficiency in their free time, such as listening to English songs and radio programs, and watching American movies and CNN news. However, 17% of them did not do any practice at all.

Subjects were then divided into advanced, intermediate, and beginning proficiency groups on the basis of their scores on the simulated TOEFL listening test taken from the previous semester. The test results ranged from 36 to 88 points, with the mean of 67 and median of 69. Thirty-four subjects whose scores ranged from 68 to 88 were labeled “advanced,” 32 subjects with scores of 51–67 were labeled “intermediate,” and 31 subjects with scores of 36–50 were labeled “beginning.” For the research purpose, only “advanced” and “beginning” groups were chosen in this study with the total number of 65 subjects.

## Materials

Choosing appropriate listening materials for instructional and research purposes is a largely subjective process. In this study, the assigned teaching material “Longman Preparation Course for the TOEFL Test” (Phillips, 1996) was selected to provide listening questions of various discourse-situated contexts. Part A consists of a set of short dialogues between two native speakers of English. After each conversation, a question about the conversation would be heard. After hearing a question, subjects had to read the four possible answers and chose the best response. Basically, the language used in the recording’s text was implicit, fragmented, and context dependent. There were many repetitions, redundancies, interruptions, pauses, and unfinished sentences.

In the textbook, listening Part A consists of six strategies along with clear instructions and exercises. For research purposes, three of the linguistic patterns, including negative expressions, functional expressions, and contrary-to-fact statements, were selected. Based on the researcher’s teaching experiences, the learners had difficulties in understanding spoken English on those three patterns, and they could not respond to those types of questions correctly either, even though they had received formal instruction in English for at least six years.

To ensure that the learners possessed the basic linguistic knowledge of those three patterns, the instructor had given learners abundant instructions before doing the test. For example,

1. Negative expressions: Typical types of negative expressions contain a negative word, prefix, or a word with “almost negative” meaning such as “There is *hardly* any food in the refrigerator.” Or “He *rarely* drives to work.”
2. Functional expressions: Types of functional expressions cover about expressions of agreement, expressions of uncertainty and suggestion, and expressions of surprise. For example, “*Why not* do it now?” Or “*So do I.*”

3. Contrary-to-fact statements: Typical types of contrary-to-fact statements mainly contain “wish” and “hope.” For example, “I wish I *had time* to help.” Or “I hope to help him if time is available.”

## Procedures

Subjects were tested by the same questions simultaneously in the language laboratory. For the measure of listening comprehension, 20 questions for each pattern were randomly chosen with the levels from easier and simpler lexicon to more challenging one. The questions in each pattern were played twice and subjects were allowed to take notes while listening and answering the questions during the listening. Each listening text consisted of the text type of short conversations with the constructed item type of multiple choices. The time of subjects' participation in the listening comprehension session was about 50 minutes. Subjects were asked to answer the questions on paper (as opposed to the Computer-Based Testing) after listening to each passage. In this study, two scoring methods were used as follows: binary (correct/incorrect) of item scores and rating scale (a self-perceived survey). Subjects received one point if they chose the correct answer. After finishing the measure, subjects were asked to complete a questionnaire that included a self-rating of the degree of difficulty based on the negative, functional, and contrary-to-fact statements (see Appendix A) and the frequency of listening strategy use (see Appendix B) for each type of pattern.

## Data Analyses

Subjects' listening performance with two different proficiency levels on the short conversational portion of the simulated TOEFL test was examined to determine their mean differences based on the assumption they could use the appropriate background knowledge in comprehending the listening text since the content of the listening text was mainly about campus life. Three main questions were taken into considerations as followed:

1. For listeners with different levels of language proficiency, which pattern may result in higher level of listening comprehension?
2. Are there any significant differences between item type and proficiency level?
3. What are the differences and frequency in listening strategy use reported by individual listeners?

To investigate which pattern among negative, functional, and contrary-to-fact statements might result in a higher level of listening comprehension for the advanced and beginning proficiency-level listeners, a *t*-test technique was computed to examine their

mean differences. In addition, to explore the interactions between item type and proficiency level, an ANOVA technique was used to test the differences among the means.

To evaluate subjects' perceptions of using the specific listening strategies for taking the simultaneous TOEFL test items on negative, functional, and contrary-to-fact statements, nine listening strategies synthesized by Defilippis (1980); O'Malley, Chamot, and Kupper (1989); and Oxford (1990) were grouped into three major direct listening strategies: memory strategy (including semantic mapping, using keywords, and using linguistic cues), cognitive strategy (including associating, getting the idea quickly, and reasoning deductively), and compensation strategy (including analyzing expressions, switching to mother tongue, and using synonym) (see Appendix B). Subjects had to perceive the frequency of their own specific use of listening strategies after answering the test items of those three patterns.

## RESULTS

*Research question 1: For listeners with different levels of proficiency, which pattern may result in a higher level of listening comprehension?*

The descriptive statistics of the mean scores for those three patterns are shown in Table 1. The results indicate that subjects had highest scores on contrary-to-fact statements ( $M = 17.84$ ,  $SD = 2.56$ ), followed by functional expression ( $M = 13.60$ ,  $SD = 3.38$ ), and then followed by negative expression ( $M = 11.56$ ,  $SD = 3.98$ ). To elicit subjects' opinions of the degree of difficulty when doing these three English patterns, a short questionnaire with ten survey questions was employed. Table 1 shows that 32.2% of the subjects considered that negative expression was the most difficult item type, followed by functional expression (14.9%) and contrary-to-fact statements (4.6%). According to subjects' self-perceptions regarding the degree of difficulty, such result broadly confirms to that of the mean scores; that is, contrary-to-fact pattern is the easiest linguistic form for understanding, and negative expression is the most difficult form.

Regarding the performance of listeners with different levels of proficiency, Table 2 summarizes the results of means between the advanced and beginning

TABLE 1  
Descriptive Results of Mean Scores for 3 Expressions

|                  | <i>N</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>Difficulty (%)</i> |
|------------------|----------|-------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| Negative         | 65       | 11.56       | 3.98      | 32.2                  |
| Functional       | 65       | 13.60       | 3.38      | 14.9                  |
| Contrary-to-fact | 65       | 17.84       | 2.56      | 4.6                   |



TABLE 2  
Results from the *t*-test for Advanced and Beginning-Level Groups

|                  | <i>Advanced</i> | <i>Beginning</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>T</i> |
|------------------|-----------------|------------------|----------|----------|
| Negative         |                 |                  |          |          |
| N                | 34              | 31               | .013     | 3.91**   |
| Mean             | 13.24           | 9.74             |          |          |
| SD               | 3.48            | 3.72             |          |          |
| Functional       |                 |                  |          |          |
| N                | 34              | 31               | .368     | 3.10**   |
| Mean             | 14.76           | 12.32            |          |          |
| SD               | 3.12            | 3.22             |          |          |
| Contrary-to-fact |                 |                  |          |          |
| N                | 34              | 31               | 8.45     | 4.02**   |
| Mean             | 18.94           | 16.64            |          |          |
| SD               | 1.58            | 2.90             |          |          |

*Note:* \*\* $P < .001$ .

groups for each of those three patterns by computing a *t* test. Results show that advanced listeners had higher mean scores than that of the beginning listeners for each pattern; significant differences were found among them at the 0.001 probability level. It is obvious that both groups yielded highest scores on the test items referring to contrary-to-fact statements. It is, therefore, assumed that for both advanced and beginning-level listeners, the pattern of contrary-to-fact statements results in the highest level of listening comprehension; however, they performed worst on the items referring to negative expression.

*Research Question 2: Are there any significant differences between item type and proficiency level?*

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to examine if there was a significant difference for those three linguistic patterns on levels of listeners. Results in Table 3 show that there were significant differences at the .05 level for those three patterns. Although the *p*-values are small (near-zero), thus indicating that it could be pointless to carry out such tests, it is still of importance that there are significant differences between different proficiency-level listeners and those three item types.

*Research Question 3: What are the differences and frequency in listening strategy use reported by different proficiency listeners?*

This study further investigated the listening strategy use at different proficiency levels for different linguistic patterns. To calculate the subjects' answers regarding listening strategy use, the technique of frequency was employed. Table 4

TABLE 3  
One-way ANOVA Analysis between Item Type and Proficiency Level

|                         | <i>SS</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>MS</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>Sig.</i> |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|-------------|
| <b>Negative</b>         |           |           |           |          |             |
| Between groups          | 49.47     | 1         | 49.47     | 15.31    | .000*       |
| Within groups           | 203.51    | 63        | 3.23      |          |             |
| Total                   | 252.99    | 64        |           |          |             |
| <b>Functional</b>       |           |           |           |          |             |
| Between groups          | 24.18     | 1         | 24.18     | 9.63     | .003*       |
| Within groups           | 158.22    | 63        | 2.51      |          |             |
| Total                   | 182.40    | 64        |           |          |             |
| <b>Contrary-to-fact</b> |           |           |           |          |             |
| Between Groups          | 21.37     | 1         | 21.37     | 16.17    | .000*       |
| Within Groups           | 83.25     | 63        | 1.32      |          |             |
| Total                   | 104.62    | 64        |           |          |             |

Note: \*P < .05.

TABLE 4  
Frequency of the Listening Strategy Use for Advanced and Beginning-level Listeners

| <i>Frequency</i>        | <i>Memory (%)</i>           |                          | <i>Cognition (%)</i>        |                          | <i>Compensation (%)</i>     |                          |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
|                         | <i>Often+<br/>Sometimes</i> | <i>Seldom+<br/>Never</i> | <i>Often+<br/>Sometimes</i> | <i>Seldom+<br/>Never</i> | <i>Often+<br/>Sometimes</i> | <i>Seldom+<br/>Never</i> |
| <b>Negative</b>         |                             |                          |                             |                          |                             |                          |
| Advanced                | 25                          | 7.1                      | 46.4                        | 7.1                      | 7.1                         | 3.6                      |
| Beginning               | 27.9                        | 3.6                      | 11.8                        | 7.4                      | 10.3                        | 0                        |
| <b>Functional</b>       |                             |                          |                             |                          |                             |                          |
| Advanced                | 28.6                        | 3.6                      | 46.4                        | 3.6                      | 14.3                        | 3.6                      |
| Beginning               | 47.6                        | 0                        | 38.1                        | 0                        | 9.5                         | 4.8                      |
| <b>Contrary-to-fact</b> |                             |                          |                             |                          |                             |                          |
| Advanced                | 25.8                        | 3.2                      | 41.9                        | 6.4                      | 22.6                        | 0                        |
| Beginning               | 53.3                        | 3.3                      | 33.3                        | 0                        | 10                          | 0                        |

shows that listeners of the beginning group tended to heavily rely on memory (27.9%) to understand the message when the negative expression was used, while listeners of the advanced group relied on cognition (46.4%) as well as memory (25%). As for the functional expression, the majority of both beginning and advanced groups almost employed memory (76.2%) and cognitive (84.5%) strategies simultaneously on the process of listening. In the contrary-to-fact category, it is obvious to find that listeners of the beginning group relied heavily on memory (53.3%) and cognition (33.3%), while listeners of the advanced group relied on memory (25.8%), cognition (41.9%), as well as compensation (22.6%). The

majority (75.2%) of listeners depended on the use of cognitive strategies when listening to contrary-to-fact statements, while a significant number (79.1%) of listeners depended on the use of memory strategies as well. Based on the findings, it can be found that most listeners, especially beginning-level group, tended to put heavy emphasis on the use of memory strategies when negative expression was used. On the other hand, both groups, especially advanced group, employed the combination of the listening strategies (i.e., memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies) when listening to contrary-to-fact statements.

## DISCUSSION

Based on listeners' self-perceived reports toward the degree of difficulty on those three patterns, most advanced and beginning-level learners consider that negative expression is the most difficult item type, followed by functional expression, and then followed by contrary-to-fact statements. Such finding also confirms that both groups received highest scores on the test items referring to contrary-to-fact statements, followed by functional expression and then negative expression. It is, therefore, assumed that for the majority of listeners, contrary-to-fact pattern results in the highest level of listening comprehension; however, they perform worst on the items referring to negative expression.

It is interesting to explore listeners' different listening comprehension effects when different patterns are used on the aspect of listening strategy use. Findings regarding the frequency of listening strategy use show that to comprehend the oral messages on those three patterns successfully, advanced listeners not only decode the linguistic cues by using memory strategies but also integrate the new information into their own knowledge system by using cognitive strategies. Such findings support the previous research result (O'Malley, Chamot, & Kupper, 1989; Segalowitz & Segalowitz, 1993; Vandergrift, 2004); that is, effective listeners can integrate both the bottom-up and top-down processing automatically, with little conscious attention to individual words.

The other finding demonstrates that advanced listeners perform best on the items referring to contrary-to-fact statements due to simultaneously using more other listening strategies (i.e., compensation strategies). Such result points to the fact that a combination of various listening strategies is essential in enhancing EFL listeners' comprehension performance. To carry out the listening process more effectively, Vandergrift (2004) pointed out that listeners often use compensation strategies, and any other relevant information available to them to guess what was not understood. As for the beginning-level listeners, they self-report that they have limited language knowledge and vocabulary; therefore, they have problems in understanding the message. This is likely due to inappropriate or inefficient bottom-up processing, because word recognition skills of ineffective

listeners are not yet fully automatized (Vandergrift, 2004; Tyler, 2001); as a result, they relate mostly to linguistic cues and determine the meanings of individual words by using memory strategies (O'Malley, Chamot, & Kupper, 1989; Jensen & Hansen, 1995). However, using memory strategies to recall linguistic details and overemphasize the bottom-up skills may interfere with attending to the whole comprehension for fluent bottom-up processing (Osada, 2001; Vandergrift, 2004; Shang, 2005). No wonder beginning-level listeners perform worst on items referring to negative expression because they heavily employ the memory strategies to construct meaning on a word-by-word basis only.

### INSTRUCTIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The results obtained in this study have implications for EFL teachers to recognize the directions of instructional practices for enhancing Taiwanese EFL listeners' comprehension by emphasizing top-down processing approaches, developing word-recognition skills, as well as combining various listening strategies effectively. To develop listeners' top-down processing skills, it is suggested to use short and authentic texts on topics related to learners' level, interest, and familiarity. EFL teachers may first ask their students to listen to the text as a whole and then try to interpret what they hear. This approach will allow listeners to use prediction and monitoring strategies for deeper cognitive processing of the text (Vandergrift, 2004).

Top-down processing strategies may help to predict the main idea of the text, but ineffective listeners are not always able to recognize even the words that they do know (Field, 2003). Hulstijn (2001) suggested that the development of a top-down approach for listening is inadequate for linguistic input. He argues that bottom-up skills must also be developed, so that all the components of the linguistic cues become meaningful units for the listeners. To develop listeners' bottom-up processing skills for word recognition, it is important to enhance their vocabulary and linguistic knowledge since they are significantly correlated with listening comprehension (Meccarty, 2000). Especially for Taiwanese learners of English, listening is even more difficult for them because there are different rhythms, phonemes, and grammatical forms between Chinese and English (Hsieh, 1997). It is suggested that before listening to the text, EFL teachers should show students keywords that may interfere with their overall understanding of the text. According to Vandergrift (2004), this approach can build beginning-level listeners' confidence and help them learn to use effective combinations of top-down and bottom-up processing strategies to understand the text. Besides, EFL teachers should also recognize that learners' particular linguistic knowledge, especially negative expression, contributes to lower listening comprehension in the present study. Teachers should, therefore, strengthen students' linguistic

knowledge of negative expression with more practices and uses in their everyday discourse to help them gain greater control of that particular linguistic pattern (Levy & Nelson, 1994).

Listeners' comments after the listening test may also provide insights for EFL educators. Many listeners report that they experienced difficulty in making the transition from understanding classroom talk to understanding natural language. Their comments suggest that more exposures to authentic speech might be helpful. Buck (1995) maintained that listening ability can only be achieved by listening to a lot of realistic texts for communicative purposes. To prepare listeners for communication as it exists in the real world, it is necessary for teachers to expose them to natural, native-like speech. In planning lessons, teachers should incorporate authentic listening materials from a variety of topics as well as realistic listening tasks.

To summarize, listening comprehension involves the use of various listening strategies that interact freely with each other to help listeners construct a meaningful interpretation of what they hear. Teaching listeners how to use these strategies in efficient and effective ways needs to balance the top-down and bottom-up approaches. The recent literature on the FL listening instruction states that listeners can benefit from an approach where listening strategies are taught in an integrated way. Guiding listeners through the process as a whole as part of regular listening activities can help learners improve overall as listeners (Vandergrift, 2004; Field, 2003; Holden, 2002).

## DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Several directions for future research emerge as the results of this study are considered since the results leave several questions unanswered. How does word-level learning affect EFL learners' listening comprehension? Does linguistic knowledge override the effects of background knowledge? How do the indirect learning strategies (i.e., metacognitive, affective, and social strategies) influence listening comprehension? Much future work is needed to better understand the relative contribution of direct and indirect listening strategies at different proficiency levels for different tasks.

The analyses conducted in this study are by all means exploratory, and the results are generalized only to a Taiwanese EFL population. It is hoped that the research results may help EFL teachers better understand how to balance top-down and bottom-up processing approaches and then train EFL learners linguistically and cognitively by using an integrated approach, in which all listening strategies (including direct and indirect strategies) are used simultaneously on the basis of learners' proficiency level with a wide variety of real-life tasks.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

This is the questionnaire to evaluate subjects' perceptions of doing the simulated TOEFL items.

1. What do you think of using the simulated TOEFL items to evaluate (test) your listening ability?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
very effectively    effectively    no opinion    ineffectively    very ineffectively

2. How do you feel the difficulty for "Negative Expression"?

1            2            3            4            5  
very easy    easy    average    difficult    very difficult

3. Did you have any problems in doing this part? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_  
If yes, what are they? \_\_\_\_\_

4. How do you feel the difficulty for "Functional Expression"?

1            2            3            4            5  
very easy    easy    average    difficult    very difficult

5. Did you have any problems in doing this part? Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_  
If yes, what are they? \_\_\_\_\_

6. How do you feel the difficulty for "Contrary-to-fact statements"?

1            2            3            4            5  
very easy    easy    average    difficult    very difficult

7. Did you have any problem in doing this part? Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_  
If yes, what are they? \_\_\_\_\_

8. Overall, which part of expression do you like to do most? \_\_\_\_\_  
Why? \_\_\_\_\_

9. Overall, which part of expression do you dislike to do most? \_\_\_\_  
Why? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Overall, what are your problems in doing the listening comprehension test?



## Appendix B

This is the questionnaire to evaluate the frequency of using the specific listening strategies for doing the simultaneous TOEFL test items on negative, functional, and contrary-to-fact statements.

| <i>Strategies</i> | <i>Techniques</i>          | <i>Frequency</i> |                  |               |              |
|-------------------|----------------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------|--------------|
|                   |                            | <i>Often</i>     | <i>Sometimes</i> | <i>Seldom</i> | <i>Never</i> |
| Memory            | Semantic mapping           |                  |                  |               |              |
|                   | Using keywords             |                  |                  |               |              |
|                   | Using linguistic cues      |                  |                  |               |              |
| Cognitive         | Associating                |                  |                  |               |              |
|                   | Getting the idea quickly   |                  |                  |               |              |
|                   | Reasoning deductively      |                  |                  |               |              |
| Compensation      | Analyzing expressions      |                  |                  |               |              |
|                   | Switching to mother tongue |                  |                  |               |              |
|                   | Using synonym              |                  |                  |               |              |

1. Semantic mapping: To listen to every word of the sentence for better understanding of the conversation
2. Using keywords: To search for some keywords in the conversation to make sense of what the speaker talks about
3. Using linguistic cues: To use linguistic cues/grammatical knowledge to help comprehension (e.g., to identify subject and verb of the sentence)
4. Associating: To associate what you heard with what you already knew (e.g., to use background knowledge)
5. Getting the idea quickly: To get what the speaker intends to express
6. Reasoning deductively: To infer/analyze what the speaker is going to say/ask next
7. Analyzing expression: To identify sentence patterns to help for better understanding
8. Switching to mother tongue: To translate word for word into Chinese
9. Using synonym: To use the skill of paraphrasing