

## The Qualitative Study of Senior Learners' Anxiety of English Listening Comprehension

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this study is to identify English listening anxiety factors as perceived by senior learners, and some factors that might reduce those anxieties in an attempt to understand fully the role that anxiety might play in learning English. Two senior English learners participated in this study at a community university in Changhua County. Qualitative interviews were used for data collection. As a result, one theme that emerged was consistent across all both participants' responses. The one theme identified was: factors believed to cause English listening anxiety. The results of this study provide English teachers with obvious listening comprehension anxiety factors and instructional activities that should be planned that reduce English listening anxiety for senior English learners. Also, results of the research are of significant and may prove beneficial to English language instruction in community colleges for senior English learners.*

**Keywords:** *English listening comprehension, anxiety, senior learners*

### Introduction

Language learning depends on listening since it provides the aural input that serves as the basis for language acquisition and enables learners to interact in spoken communication. Thus, listening has emerged as a significant component in the process of second language acquisition (Feyten, 1991). As an input skill, listening plays a vital part in language learners' development. Krashen (1985) stated that people acquire language by making sense of the linguistic information they hear. Therefore, language acquisition is achieved mainly through receiving understandable input and listening proficiency is the important component in achieving understandable language input.

According to Vandergrift (1997), listening comprehension was defined as an active process requiring the skills of prediction, hypothesizing, checking, revising, and generalizing for the listening inputs. Besides this, these processes involve understanding a speaker's accent or pronunciation, the speakers' grammar and vocabulary, and comprehension of meaning. A good listener is capable of doing these four things simultaneously Vandergrift (1997). It is widely agreed that anxiety plays a vital part while learning a foreign language. In terms of language learning anxiety, it includes specific anxieties related to language skills such as speaking, reading, writing, and listening. Among these, one of the domains in which little research has been carried out is foreign language listening anxiety (Kimura, 2008). Vogely (1998) stated

various potential sources of listening comprehension anxiety based on students' statements: listening input is not clear or is given too fast, and students' belief that they have to make sense of every single word. Also, the nature of the listening comprehension practice and insufficiency of listening time were other reported causes for listening anxiety. For too few listening comprehension has been given little attention in the English language learning program, especially for senior English learners. This could be due to the fact that there has been a lack of research interest into English listening comprehension. Hopefully, this study would fill in this missing gap, and find the potential factors influencing English listening comprehension and strategies to be taken that might improve senior English learners' listening comprehension. The main research questions are as follows:

1. Do senior English learners experience foreign language listening anxiety during an exam or in a classroom?
2. What has caused the anxiety in English listening classroom and activities?

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

A total of two subjects participated in this study. Their ages ranged from 50-55 years old, and both of them have enrolled the community university in Changhua County.

### **Data Collection**

For this study, the researcher conducted a face to face in-depth interview with each participant, in Chinese; each interview lasted thirty minutes or less. The researcher began with a general interview of each participant. During the interview, the researcher wrote down some important information for further qualitative analyses.

## **Data Analysis**

The taped interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Content analysis was used to analyze transcripts for this study. In the initial stage, the researcher conducted an extensive and intensive analysis of the content of the data, writing notes as the researcher listened to the tape recordings and read the transcripts numerous times. The researcher identified groups of related utterances which reflected a common perspective and revealed recurring topics and themes. As a result, two themes that emerged were consistent across both participants' responses. The one theme identified was: factors believed to cause English listening anxiety.

## **Results**

The results of the interviews showed that both interviewees has experienced different degrees of English listening anxiety, and the study generalized the main sources of English listening anxiety as follows.

### **Lack of learning confidence**

(Participant A): I felt a lack of confidence and was under a lot of pressure while listening, because I was so afraid of listening activities.

### **Speech rate**

(Participant A): I was at a loss during English listening activities, because speech rate was too fast for me. Also, I could not catch up with speech rate, either.

(Participant B): When listening to English, sometimes I gave up if the listening content was read too fast.

### **Speech pronunciation**

(Participant A): Listening to different accents was challenging for me, because I easily missed some important information and that led to anxiety.

(Participant B): When I listened to foreign speakers, I easily felt nervous.

### **Vocabulary**

(Participant A): When I listened to many difficult and long vocabulary words in the text, they made me feel uneasy and stressed.

To sum up, senior learners' English anxiety can be attributed to 4 sources: lack of learning confidence, the fear of speech rate, the fear of speech pronunciation, and lack of vocabulary comprehension.

### **Conclusions and Suggestions**

Since the senior English learners are lacking in learning confidence, they become anxious easily. During the listening comprehension process, the listeners are in a passive position rather than active one. Because of this, it was not easy for them to deal with incoming information immediately; thus they felt anxious during the listening process. On the other hand, the characteristics of listening to texts including speed rate, pronunciation, length, level of the text, and vocabulary also impact listeners' listening comprehension and raise listening anxiety to various degrees. In order to help senior English learners and improve the quality of English learning classes, some suggestions have been made. Students should build their listening confidence by cultivating their listening strategies. Cultivating senior learners' listening

strategies is one of the most difficult tasks for any EFL teacher. Generally speaking, this is because successful listening strategies are acquired over time and with a lot of practice. For beginners, the most significant listening strategy is discrimination in English pronunciation, intonation, and accent. They need to acquire the crucial strategy of identifying the main information of the text. When students acquire basic discrimination ability, they can select and analyze the meaning of what they hear and grasp the main content. In the teaching process teachers should cultivate students' ability to select main information and instruct them to distinguish the general meaning of listening texts on the whole (Kond & Yang, 2004). Besides this, the ability to guess the meaning of words and vocabulary is also an important listening strategy. Listening comprehension does not refer to understanding every word, but some words play an important part in listening comprehension. However, students may guess the meaning of new vocabulary on the basis of the topic being discussed and gain some understanding of the probable linguistic items on the basis of the context discourses, the grammatical structure and the background knowledge of the topic (Pappamihiel, 2002). In terms of outside the class, students need to engage in extensive listening; listening to various language phenomena and gain more knowledge through TV programs, radio, and movies. Exposure to demands of listening should include aspects of everyday life. Teachers must create relaxed a language-learning environment that will stimulate learners' interest and confidence and raise students' passion and enthusiasm for listening to English. Another benefit of creating a harmonious and relaxed learning atmosphere is that it benefits students by reducing their anxiety and increasing their receiving comprehensible input (Vogely, 1999).

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