

**FACTORS AND STRATEGIES THAT AFFECT THE DEVELOPMENT OF
LISTENING COMPREHENSION SKILLS: A CASE STUDY**

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BUCARAMANGA
2010**

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Trabajo de grado como requisito parcial para optar al título de LICENCIADO EN
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RESUMEN

TÍTULO: FACTORS AND STRATEGIES THAT AFFECT THE DEVELOPMENT OF LISTENING COMPREHENSION SKILLS: A CASE STUDY *

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PALABRAS CLAVES:

Licenciatura en Ingles, comprensión oral, estrategias de comprensión oral, niveles de desarrollo de comprensión oral, nivel literal, nivel interpretativo, nivel crítico.

DESCRIPCIÓN:

Este estudio describe los factores y estrategias utilizados por una estudiante en el nivel avanzado de la carrera de licenciatura en Inglés en la UIS para desarrollar su nivel de comprensión oral en lengua inglesa. El diseño metodológico del estudio de caso tuvo en cuenta la elaboración y aplicación de una prueba para determinar su nivel de comprensión oral.

La estructura de la prueba incluyó cuatro dimensiones adaptadas a los niveles de comprensión oral propuestos por Lawtie¹, literal, interpretativo y crítico. La cuarta dimensión que se tuvo en cuenta fue adaptada a través de la prueba *Pearson Test of English General*² que mide el nivel de la competencia de comprensión oral.

Los resultados de este estudio demuestran que el nivel de competencia oral de la estudiante no corresponde al estándar propuesto para su nivel de estudio. Los resultados de la prueba demostraron que el desarrollo de la habilidad de comprensión oral de la estudiante alcanza sólo el nivel literal. Lo cual lleva a concluir que se requiere una implementación intencional de estrategias pedagógicas que lleven a un nivel equilibrado de desarrollo de las habilidades lingüísticas de los estudiantes de licenciatura en inglés con características similares al sujeto de este estudio.

* Proyecto de Grado.

** Facultad de Ciencias Humanas, Escuela de Idiomas. Director: Esperanza Revelo Jiménez.

¹ Lawtie, Fiona. "English Language Arts 6 – 9: Speaking and Listening: Instructional Philosophy and Teaching Suggestions". 2008. Web. 10 May 2010.

² Tomado de: <http://www.examenglish.com/LTE/listening5.php>. Pearson Test of English General (formerly London Test): Listening level 5 practice test

ABSTRACT

TÍTULO: FACTORS AND STRATEGIES THAT AFFECT THE DEVELOPMENT OF LISTENING COMPREHENSION SKILLS: A CASE STUDY *

AUTHORS: ANGIE RAMIREZ
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KEYWORDS:

ELT, listening comprehension, listening strategies, developmental levels of listening, literal level, interpretive level, critical level.

DESCRIPTION:

This study describes the factors and strategies used by an advanced student in the ELT program at UIS in order to develop her level of listening comprehension in the English language. The methodology of this case study considered the design and application of a listening test to measure the subject's actual level of listening comprehension.

The test included four different dimensions based on the developmental levels of listening proposed by Lawtie¹ which are literal, interpretive and critical. The fourth dimension taken into account was adapted from the *Pearson Test of English General*² aimed at determining the level of listening comprehension.

The results of this study show that the Student's expected level of listening comprehension is not adequate despite the fact that the subject's estimated level of listening comprehension was advanced. The results of the listening test demonstrate that the case subject had developed a literal level of listening. It can be concluded that an implementation of pedagogical strategies is needed to equilibrate the development of linguistic abilities of the ELT students with similar characteristics to the subject of this case study.

* Final Project Paper.

** Faculty of Human Sciences, School of Languages. Advisor: Esperanza Revelo Jiménez.

¹ Lawtie, Fiona. "English Language Arts 6 – 9: Speaking and Listening: Instructional Philosophy and Teaching Suggestions". 2008. Web. 10 May 2010.

² Taken from: <http://www.examenglish.com/LTE/listening5.php>. Pearson Test of English General (formerly London Test): Listening level 5 practice test

INTRODUCTION

This case study focuses on describing the listening comprehension strategies used by a female student enrolled in the fifth semester of the ELT program at UIS. The study collects data from the subject through a structured interview, a questionnaire about listening strategies, advanced listening comprehension tests, field notes and subjects' self-reports.

The main research concern deals with the description of the subject's actual level of listening. It has been observed through surveys, listening tests and self reports that the subject's main problem when listening is the lack of appropriate listening strategies that would help her develop better listening comprehension skills, therefore her actual level of listening is very basic.

The data analysis demonstrates that the case subject has developed a literal level of listening (focusing on the literal meaning), despite the fact that this subject has already taken four levels of English and her expected level of listening comprehension is advanced. According to Morley (1972) listening comprehension involves not only basic auditory discrimination and grammar, but also extracting vital information, remembering it, and relating it to a context.

1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Second language listening comprehension is a complex process, crucial in the development of second language acquisition. Although listening plays an important role in the English learning process, it has been observed that listening is often taught badly or barely taught at all. An incomplete or inappropriate development of listening comprehension skills might also cause undesirable results in the overall development of communicative competencies in the second language, considering it is the least explicit of the four basic language skills, and, therefore, the most difficult one to teach (Dunkel 1991).

According to Healey (2007) the lack of autonomy from the EFL learner, who is not fully aware of the importance of listening skills, makes a lasting impact on his/her own process because it prevents him/her from adopting an active role in his/her own learning. In consequence, an adequate measure of the listening comprehension level of second language learners, plus a clear understanding of their individual use of listening comprehension strategies might help them become more conscious of their learning processes and trigger their capacities to autonomously learn by themselves.

2. JUSTIFICATION

This case study attempts to describe which factors and listening strategies influence listening comprehension skills.

In studying this particular topic, the authors will extend their knowledge into different issues of listening comprehension skills. Listening is one of the most fundamental language skills and it plays an important role in students' language development.

Researching this topic would help to gain an insight into the field the authors endeavor to take on. The knowledge and experience gained in doing this would be invaluable.

3. OBJECTIVES

3.1 GENERAL OBJECTIVE

- The main objective of this case study is to describe which factors and individual listening comprehension strategies might affect listening comprehension skills in EFL advanced learners.

3.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- To find out the factors affecting an advanced learner's development of listening comprehension skills.
- To describe the cognitive and metacognitive strategies that an advanced learner uses to develop listening comprehension skills in the second language.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Various authoritative sources in the Second Language Acquisition Research field were found to be directly related to the present study. To provide a solid theoretical foundation for this case study, a variety of sources were selected dealing with seven main topics: A definition of listening comprehension, the nature of the listening comprehension process, the listening comprehension process itself, the developmental levels of listening comprehension, strategies of listening comprehension, critical listening comprehension level and the importance of listening comprehension in language learning. In the following paragraphs, each of the above mentioned concepts will be discussed.

4.1 Definition of listening

The term “listening comprehension” has always been related to speech recognition and understanding. Brown (1990) defines listening comprehension as the ability to understand native speech at normal speed in unstructured situations. Another definition given by Goh (1997) is that listening comprehension is an active process in which the listener constructs meaning out of the information provided by the speaker. Morley (1972) defines it as including not only basic auditory discrimination and grammar, but also extracting vital information, remembering it, and relating it to a context.

Although these definitions are different, they basically consider listening comprehension as an activity in which listeners use a variety of mental processes

to comprehend information from oral texts. These mental processes used by listeners are called listening comprehension strategies.

Since listening comprehension in language learning was considered an invisible mental process, it made it difficult to describe. It was considered as a passive and simple activity, which did not have much research or pedagogical attention. At the end of the 20th century, Krashen (1985) described the role of listening as a tool for understanding and a key factor in language learning. After that period, listening emerged as an important component in the process of second language acquisition

Many studies have demonstrated that listening comprehension is an active process in which the listener must discriminate among sounds, understand words and grammar, and interpret different patterns in order to gather information to understand the context in which the listening is taking place (Feyten, 1991). Listening is a very complex activity, which requires substantial mental effort.

Listening is an active process of interpretation in which listeners match what they hear to what they already know. It is a process that enables the brain to construct meaning from the sounds that are heard. As it is an internal process which cannot be observed, it is difficult to determine whether the listener has used the required skills, or listening strategies, or what problems the listener experienced (Anderson and Lynch, 1988). For this reason listening remains the least understood and studied issue in the language area (Vandergrift, 1997).

Nevertheless, today listening comprehension has received attention of second language acquisition researchers (Rost 2002). One definition of listening given by Rost (2002) states that listening is a process of receiving what the speaker says (receptive orientation); constructing and representing meaning (constructive orientation); responding and negotiating with the speaker (collaborative orientation); and, creating meaning (transformative orientation).

Morley (1991) describes listening as "an act of processing information in which the listener is involved in a two-way communication, one-way communication, and self dialogue communication". According to him, two-way communication refers to interactive listening in which there are two interventions: speaker-listener. In one-way communication, on the other hand, the input comes from different sources such as lectures, news, announcements, films, etc. The listener listens to the speaker but does not react. Self dialogue communication is the one in which the listener takes the internal roles as "speaker" and "listener" in his/her own thought processing without being aware of it.

Vandergrift (1999) describes Listening Comprehension as a complex, active process in which the listener must discriminate between sounds, understand vocabulary and grammatical structures, interpret stress and intonation, retain what was gathered in all of the above and interpret it within socio-cultural context of the utterance (p.168).

This view of listening as a complex and active process is also shared by Richards (1985), who states that listening comprehension involves bottom-up and top-down processing. In bottom-up processing, listeners get information from the

incoming speech signals, different from top-down processing, in which the listeners use prior knowledge and expectations to create meaning.

All of the views discussed above prove that listening comprehension is a hard task, which demands a great deal of mental analysis from the listener. In order to construct the message the speaker intends, the listener must actively contribute with skills and knowledge. These include having an appropriate purpose for listening, social and cultural knowledge and background knowledge (Richards 1985).

4.2 Nature of listening comprehension

As listening was erroneously considered a passive skill, it was not given the necessary importance. Listening began to assume an important role in language teaching during the late nineteenth century when different linguists started to elaborate a theory of language acquisition (Rost 2002). However, after that, listening was still considered as a passive skill, which only provided the foundation for speaking. It did not receive the necessary attention as an important component in language learning. (Rost 2002)

Listening comprehension is a fundamental language skill that learners need in order to obtain proficiency in the language they are acquiring. It allows them to understand the speech they hear and take part in communicative interaction successfully. It is also a very important tool when teaching languages (Vandergrift 1999, Rost 2001). The teaching of listening is not simply intended to make students hear a sound, a word or a sentence, but to cultivate students' abilities to

understand the speakers' intention accurately and communicate with each other effectively.

Listening is an important part of the communication process. Learners spend most of each day listening, and much of what they learn is acquired by listening to information. Exposure to listening is vital for English students who need to hear the language spoken in meaningful contexts in order to acquire it. Listening, therefore, is an important skill in language learning.

According to Wang (2003), listening is the most important component from the aspects of English language, he suggests that as speaking, reading and writing, it deserves particular attention. He also points out that educators must explore the nature and process of listening comprehension and study its theory and methodology in order to improve listening teaching and make students recognize that listening comprehension is the crucial aspect of English learning.

Feyten (1991) states that about 45% of the total time people spend on communication is on listening. Among the four skills, listening is the language skill which usually develops faster than speaking, reading and writing. It is also the most used skill in the classroom and in daily life (Yang, 1996). Vandergrift (1997) claimed that listening helps learners to internalize not only the rules of language but also to facilitate fluency on other language skills.

4.3 The process of listening comprehension

Having studied the definitions and nature of listening, it seems that the process of listening comprehension should be given a greater emphasis both in classroom practice and research in Second Language Acquisition. There are several advocates with different perspectives on the process of listening. One of them is McKeating (1981), who states that the listener goes through certain processes in constructing a message when he/she listens. These processes are perception, decoding, prediction and selection.

Perception refers to the process of identifying speech sounds. The listener uses linguistic knowledge to identify them and makes sense of the sounds by relating them with familiar terms. Decoding is when the listener listens not only to complete sentences, but also pays attention to “chunks” or pieces of the conversation. This has implications for the teacher, who has to train the learner to listen, not only for complete sentences, but also for chunks of meaning. Prediction of specific items helps the listener to listen without struggling to understand every word. Selection refers to the process of selecting the most important and relevant information from a large quantity of data.

The relationship between listening comprehension and the spoken language is a direct one. Through listening we determine the level of comprehension. Anderson (1983) divided the listening comprehension process into three stages: perceptual, parsing, and utilization. During the perceptual process, listeners focus their attention on the oral text and memorize the sound in the echoic memory, which is a short-term memory. In the next stage, the parsing process, listeners construct mental representations by using words and complete messages. In the utilization process, the final stage, listeners use long-term

memory in order to link the message they listen to their existing knowledge. If the new input and the existing knowledge are the same, comprehension occurs (Anderson, 1983).

Richards (1985) explains this phenomenon from a different perspective. He states that there are two distinct processes involved in listening comprehension the bottom-up and top-down processes. Bottom-up processing refers to acquiring the meaning of the message based on the input from sounds, to words, to grammatical relationships, and finally to the meaning. On the other hand, top-down processing refers to using the learner's prior knowledge to deduce the meaning and interpret the message. Prior knowledge can be related to the topic, the listening context, the culture or other information. Listeners use content words and contextual clues to understand better

In addition to the above mentioned theory, as cited by Richards in *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice*, Nunan (2002) argues that listening comprehension is neither top-down nor bottom-up processing only. It is an interactive process where listeners employ both prior knowledge and linguistic knowledge to construct meaning from the incoming message. The frequency with which listeners use one process or the other will depend on their knowledge of the language, familiarity with the topic or the purpose for listening. For example, listening for the general idea involves primarily top-down processing, while listening for specific information, as in a weather broadcast, involves primarily bottom-up processing to comprehend all the desired details.

4.4 Developmental levels of listening

It is not unknown for us that listening is one of the most important skills for a successful conversation process. Fiona Lawtie, ELT teacher of the British Council in Caracas remarks that students spend the majority of each school day listening and much of what students know is acquired through listening. She also states that listening is more than hearing; comprehending spoken language involves process-oriented thinking skills. Because listening involves the use of language and thought, the ability to listen effectively develops as students' language abilities develop and mature.

Lawtie also argues that exposure to oral English is very important for ESL students, who need to hear the language spoken in meaningful contexts in order to acquire it. Their receptive (listening) language abilities precede their expressive (speaking) language abilities, so they need to spend a great deal of time listening before and as they develop their speaking abilities.

She also says that the listening process is recursive in nature. Students may hear a sound from a stimulus, attend to it, evaluate it, and continue to listen. Students may attend to a speaker's message and respond to it without choosing to remember or evaluate it. The listening purpose and context, and the student's listening maturity will determine the level of listening.

According to Lawtie, there are three main levels of listening in a developmental view as shown in table 1.

Levels of Listening		Factors That Influence Listening Abilities
<p>Literal Level</p> <p>(hearing, receiving, attending)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It refers to hearing or the actual physical awareness of sounds and language caused by stimuli (e.g., words, verbal and nonverbal cues) • It includes hearing, but involves the listener's ability to focus attention on the speaker or on the verbal and nonverbal language without becoming distracted; requires motivation, desire, and effort on the part of the listener 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical factors (e.g., hearing loss, hyperactivity, limited attention span, inability to sit still, easily distracted) • Physical environment (e.g., comfort of listener, location of listener in relation to the speaker) • Emotional and psychological factors (e.g., environment and conditions of trust that exist, listener's self-concept) • Fluency in English
<p>Interpretive Level</p> <p>(remembering, responding, assigning meaning)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It refers to the process that listeners engage in as they assign meaning to the stimuli; depends on prior knowledge of the topic and the language of the speaker, and the context of the listening situation, as well as on the listener's schema as it relates to the speaker's schema • It refers to the selective storage of information in the listener's mind for retrieval at another time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient language development: limited personal language that makes it difficult for listener to make sense of other's language • Impaired speech that limits reproduction of sounds and hence accurate listening ability

<p>Critical Level</p> <p>(evaluating, judging, reacting, responding)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It refers to the judgements made by the listener as a result of interpreting the speaker's ideas using critical thinking skills • It includes evaluating, but refers to the expression of judgements and interpretations, as well as to seeking clarity of understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception of the importance and value of the message • Pre-formed opinions and attitudes toward the speaker or the message • Inability to make connections between new ideas and prior knowledge • Inability to process oral language in a meaningful way
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Table 1: Developmental levels of listening

4.5 Listening comprehension strategies

Robin and Guo (2007) affirm that listening strategies are techniques or activities that contribute to the comprehension and recall of listening input. The use of a specific strategy depends principally on how the listener processes the input. According to Richards (2008) two different kinds of processes are involved in understanding spoken discourse. These are referred to as *top-down* and *bottom-up* processes.

Vandergrift (1997) states that listeners use top-down strategies when they use prior knowledge to identify general aspects of the topic such as the cultural background, the type of text and the language. By using these strategies the listener activates a set of expectations that help him to interpret what is heard and

anticipate what will come next. On the other hand, bottom-up strategies are text based in which the listener relies on the language in the message, that is, the listener creates meaning from level sound to words to grammatical relationships to lexical meaning in order to obtain the final message.

O'Malley and Chamot (1989) identify three main types of strategies used by L2 learners: Metacognitive, cognitive and social strategies. Metacognitive strategies help learners coordinate their own learning process. These strategies involve planning, monitoring and evaluating how successful a particular strategy is. The cognitive strategies manipulate the material to be learned. The social strategies mean learning by interacting with others.

In Vandergriff's (2003) investigation, which attempted to examine the relationship between listening proficiency and listening strategy use, 36 junior high school students of French in Canada were recruited to perform listening strategy activities. The study found that the more proficient listeners employed metacognitive strategies more frequently than the less proficient listeners. This study suggested that teaching less proficient listeners to use metacognitive strategies would enhance their listening performance, because the metacognitive process engages a listener in different conscious actions such as the analysis of the listening task requirements, activation of appropriate listening processes, making predictions of the task, and monitoring and evaluating his/her own comprehension.

4.6 Critical listening

Boyd (2005) views the term 'critical listening' as a broad set of listening comprehension skills, including listening for basic understanding, for inferential or pragmatic understanding, and for understanding of organizational or rhetorical structure. Boyd (2005) suggested a critical listening model in which the learner's role is to understand the specific meaning of an utterance within its social and cultural context. In this process, the learner is using, often without conscious awareness, some strategies (inferencing and interpreting) to succeed in the communicative task. It has been claimed (Boyd, 2005) the people who are well – educated in their first language are able to develop better critical listening skills.

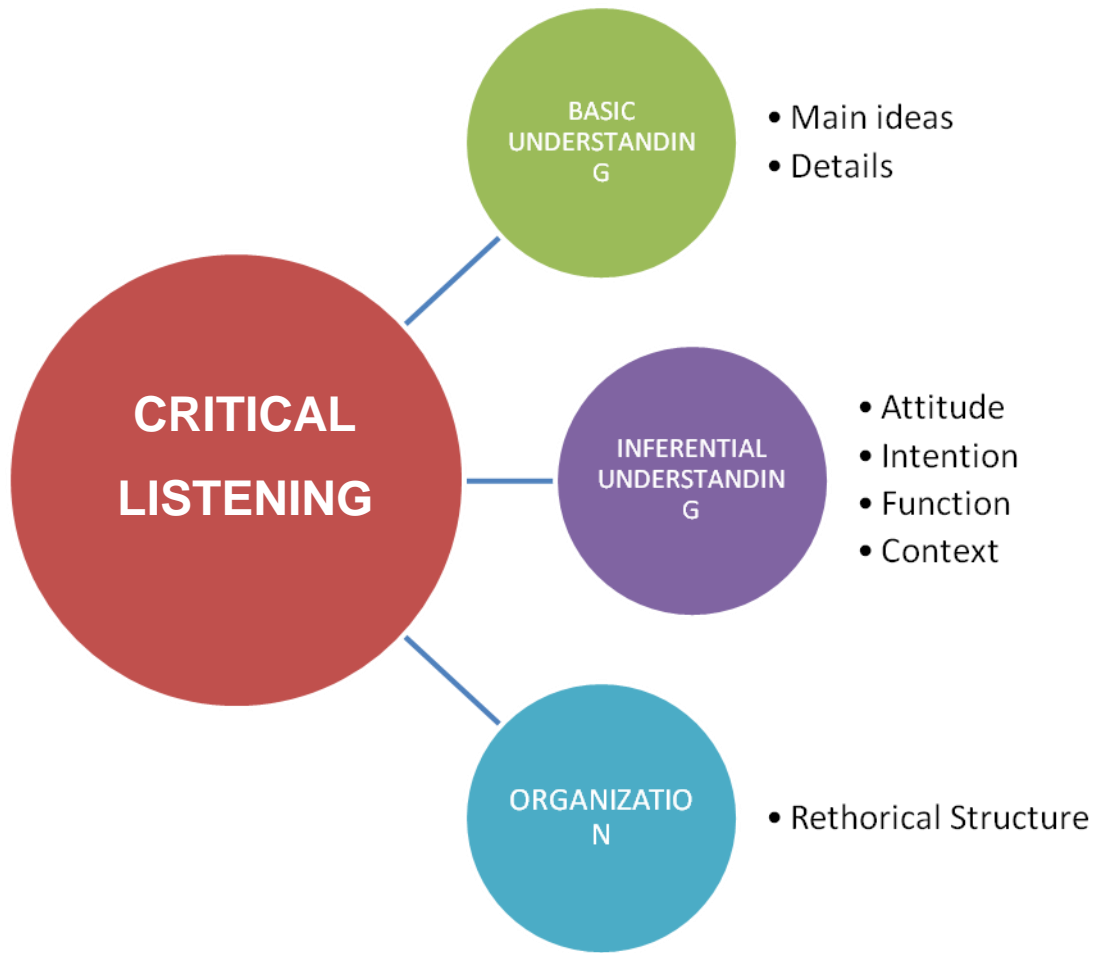


Table 2 : Critical Listening

4.7 The importance of listening in language learning

Listening plays an important role in language learning since it provides the aural input that facilitates language acquisition (Vandergrift, 1997). Listening is the language part that is used most frequently and therefore cannot be considered as an isolated skill. In language learning, listening provides the learner with solid foundations to interact in spoken communication. Vandergrift affirms that people gain a large portion of their education through listening.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Type of research

This is a qualitative research work, geared towards studying the particular case of an advanced English language learner in order to describe which factors contribute to hinder the development of listening comprehension skills and the individual learning strategies associated with them. It is important to observe that a case study connotes a single phenomenon observed at a single point over some period of time. (Gerring 2007). It concentrates on what is unique and the result cannot be statistically generalized to a whole population of learners, classes or institutions.

5.2 Case subject

The subject of this study is a 22 year old female student, who is enrolled in the advanced English in the ELT program. She has been studying English for 3 years and currently lives with her parents in Girón, Santander. In 2009, the subject participated in a work and travel program in the United States for three months. Her job consisted of designing and implementing group activities for teenagers. She interacted with native speakers of English as well as with participants from different countries. English was the language of communication in the summer camp.

5.3 Data collection tools

The present study collects data from the subject through a semi-structured interview, a questionnaire about listening strategies, an advanced listening comprehension test, field notes and subjects' self-reports.

5.3.1 Interview

The first step in this case study was to interview the participant in order to build up a profile based on information regarding her social and academic background. (See Appendix 1)

5.3.2 Listening strategies survey

The researchers applied a Self-assessment listening inventory to know about the listening strategies the participant used when doing a particular listening task. . (See Appendix 2)

5.3.3 Listening comprehension test

Based on all the information collected, a listening test was designed to measure the subject's actual level of aural comprehension. The test consisted of

four different tasks, three aimed at finding out the different levels of listening comprehension (literal, interpretive and critical). The remaining task was designed on an adaptive model originally produced by Pearson, and aimed at determining the aural comprehension level of development. (See Appendix 3 – 4 and 5)

5.3.4 Field Notes

During meetings with the subject as well as during the moment of applying the tests, the researchers took attentive notes of relevant information to the purpose of the study.

5.3.5 Self-reports

The subject was asked to report about the mental processes taking place while responding to the listening test. (See Appendix 8)

5.4 DATA ANALYSIS

Listening comprehension test analysis

Based on the evaluation criteria, the researchers assessed the participant's performance on the listening test (See appendix 6 and 7)

PART 1 - Literal level:

In this test, after listening to dialogue, the subject had to complete 16 blanks with the exact words used (See appendix 3 – Part 1). The speakers in the recording used Hindi and Australian accents. She scored two (2) out of sixteen (16) words.

The results obtained allowed researchers to conclude that the subject presented some difficulties when listening to unfamiliar or unusual vocabulary (See table 3). In a first attempt, and after analyzing the results, it was thought that the participant was having problems understanding non-native speakers of English. This was inferred taking into account the score obtained (See table 4).

However, we found no evidence of that insinuation in the self-report. On the contrary, the participant described that she had not felt good because she had not been able to complete the blank spaces. She says, *“Well... that was so weird (laughs) because when I was listening I found that easy but, when I was trying to write, I don't know, I got lost”*. (See appendix 8)

Participant's answers		Correct answers
Together of the bans	✗	gather on the banks
Religious festival	✓	religious festival
Following	✗	falling to earth
Believe to conform	✗	believed to confer
Living life	✗	living lives
Relieh decorated	✗	richly-decorated
Largier religion	✗	largest religious
On earth	✓	on earth
Way prevent	✗	wipe away
Down poor	✗	Downpour
Push	✗	Bushfires
Pouring wet	✗	putting out
Pushline	✗	Bushland
Direct	✗	Threatened
Pourness	✗	Poisonous
Wild with	✗	Welfare

Table 3. Participant's correct and incorrect answers – Literal Level

Developmental levels of listening	Number of questions	Right answers	Score
Literal level	16	2	12.5%

Table 4: Results of developmental levels of listening: Literal level

PART 2 - Interpretive Level

This listening test consisted of listening to a conversation about different ways to learn a foreign language (See appendix 3 – Part 2). The subject's ability to listen, remember and respond was being evaluated. Five (5) multiple-choice questions were selected. Apparently the subject had no problem comprehending and fulfilling this task. The participant reported that she liked this kind of listening exercise because *she could understand every word she heard* (See appendix 8)

Participant's answers			Correct answers
1	c. On TV	✓	c. On TV
2	c. Coming up with a study plan	✓	c. Coming up with a study plan
3	a. A realistic goal for learners is to reach a certain level of language proficiency, not native fluency.	✓	a. A realistic goal for learners is to reach a certain level of language proficiency, not native fluency.
4	b. reading books and magazines for news	✗	c. <i>Being involved in group or class projects</i>
5	b. Pronunciation practice is Key to improved comprehensibility	✓	b. Pronunciation practice is Key to improved comprehensibility

Table 5: Participant's correct and incorrect answers – Interpretive level

Developmental levels of listening	Number of	Right answers	score
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	questions		
1. Interpretive level	5	4	80%

Table 6: Results of developmental levels of listening: interpretive level

PART 3 - Critical Level

For this section of the test, the participant was asked to listen to three people talking about a specific topic (See appendix 3 - Part 3). As the participant was listening she was asked to identify the topic being discussed as well as the position of each speaker towards it. This test was intended to evaluate the judgements made by the listener as a result of interpreting the speakers' ideas using critical thinking skills.

Although the participant could recognize the topic being discussed, she had problems when identifying the position of each speaker (See table 7) When she was asked to express her agreement or disagreement with one of the speakers, she said she could not. She struggled to take a position and make arguments that she preferred to decline continuing with the task. She felt frustrated for not understanding completely what the speakers had said. She claimed that *she could have comprehended much better if she had discriminated word by word* (See appendix 8).

Developmental levels of listening	Right answers	Score
3. critical level – TOPIC: Atheism	✓	10 %
Position 1: Answered incorrectly	✗	
Position 2: Did not answer	✗	
Position 3: Did not answer	✗	

Table 7: Results of developmental levels of listening: critical level

PART 4: Adaptive listening test:

In this listening test the subject had to listen to a radio interview about a prize-winning teacher (See appendix 3 - Part 4). This assessment was a multiple choice form in which the subject was asked to select the best possible answer out of the choices from a list of ten questions. The participant's score was 2 out of 10 (See table 8). The questions varied in degree of difficulty and the speaker had a British accent (See Table 9). The participant had difficulties understanding and answering correctly. She said that *the test was too difficult for her and that the speed of the speaker was a problem.* (See appendix 8)

Participant's answers			Correct answers
1	D	✗	B
2	-	✗	D
3	a	✗	C
4	A	✗	D
5	-	✗	A
6	C	✓	C
7	A	✗	C
8	C	✗	A
9	A	✗	A
10	B	✓	B

Table 8: Participant's correct and incorrect answers – Aural Comprehension Level of Development Test

Question	Degree of difficulty
1	Easy
2	Easy
3	Medium
4	Easy
5	Hard
6	Medium
7	Hard
8	Medium
9	Hard
10	Hard

Table 9: Degree of difficulty - Aural Comprehension Level of Development Test

6. CONCLUSIONS

English listening competence is a complex skill that needs conscious development. It can be best developed with practice when students reflect on the process of listening.

An outcome of the study is that the subject's expected level of listening comprehension is not adequate. It was also found that the subject has developed a literal level of listening, which means that she focuses only on understanding word for word.

Another conclusion is that even when the subject reported using listening strategies, there are certain strategies that need to be worked not only in class but also individually. These strategies can help the student improve his/her listening comprehension skills.

It is also evident from this study that in order to improve the listening comprehension skills it is vital the implementation of pedagogical strategies that equilibrate the development of linguistic abilities of the ELT students with similar characteristics to the subject of this case study.

Finally, it can be concluded that improving ELT students' ability to listen effectively and use appropriate strategies is a demanding process and there are still many factors, intellectual and non-intellectual, subjective and objective, influencing language acquisition that need to be considered and further explored.

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Appendix 1



UNIVERSIDAD INDUSTRIAL DE SANTANDER
FACULTY OF HUMAN SCIENCES
SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES

Demographic Survey

Instructions: Read the following questions and choose the most suitable option for you.

1. **What is your name?** _____
2. **What is your gender?** Male Female
3. **How old are you?** _____
4. **Where are you from?** Bucaramanga _____ other, which one _____
5. **What are your religious views?**
 Catholic Christian Other: which one _____
6. **Do you have siblings?**
Yes How many? _____ No
7. **What is your social stratification?**
1 2 3 other
8. **What is your parents' marital status?**
Single married cohabit separated

9. Does your mother work? If yes, please specify what she does

Yes _____ No

10. Does your father work? If yes, please specify what he does

Yes _____ No

11. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Elementary School High School University

12. Which of the following best describes the area you live in?

Urban Suburban Rural

13. Whom from your family has had any contact with the English language?

Parents Siblings Other relatives

Which ones _____

14. Which is your current level of English?

Beginner Pre-Intermediate Intermediate Upper Intermediate

15. How long have you been studying English?

16. What kind of language learning experiences have you had?

_____.

Appendix 2



UNIVERSIDAD INDUSTRIAL DE SANTANDER
FACULTY OF HUMAN SCIENCES
SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES
ELT PROGRAM

Self-assessment Listening Inventory

Date: _____ Semester: _____

Directions: As part of a research project on Autonomous Language Learning, we would like you to complete this questionnaire about the listening strategies you use when performing certain tasks involving listening skills.

Please read each statement and mark with an “X” the option that best describes you.

Answer in terms of how well the statement **describes you**. Do not answer how you think you should be, or what other people do. *There are no right or wrong answers to these statements.*

	Alwa ys	Some times	Never
1. I pay attention when I am listening.			
2. I am interrupted by noises in the room when listening carefully.			
3. I judge the speaker’s ideas objectively.			
4. I find the speaker’s personal habits distracting (e.g., clearing the throat constantly).			
5. I organize in my mind what I hear so that I can remember it.			

6. I ask the speaker for clarification on confusing ideas.			
7. I find that listening in English is more difficult than the other skills.			
8. I understand the meaning of unknown words from the context of the conversation.			
9. I separate facts from explanations or from opinions			
10. I feel that listening comprehension in English is a challenge for me			
11. I tell the difference between important and unimportant details.			
12. I detect unsupported ideas that a speaker says.			
13. I don't feel nervous when I listen to English			
14. I am able to accept points of view different from my own.			
15. I am able to identify ideas that impress me as I listen			
16. I recreate what others tell me in my mind.			
17. I am able to describe with words what I hear from others.			

(Adapted from Mowbray & George, 1992, p. 64.)

Appendix 3



UNIVERSIDAD INDUSTRIAL DE SANTANDER
FACULTY OF HUMAN SCIENCES
SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES
ELT PROGRAM

Listening test

PART 1 - Literal Level

Please do not write on this booklet. Write your answers on the answer sheet

Listen to two reporters featuring news from around the world. Complete the sentences with the exact words used.

More than 70 million Hindus have begun to (a) _____ of the river Ganges in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh for the (b) _____ of Maha Kumbh Mela. The festival is held every twelve years in order to commemorate the mythological (c) _____ of the four drops of liquid (d) _____ immortality. The event began this week with a parade of sadhus – Hindu Holy men (e) _____ of strict simplicity – Accompanied by parades of elephants and (f) _____ chariots. A thirty-square-mile tent city has been built to house pilgrims who have travelled from all over the world for the event, described by many as the (g) “ _____ gathering(h) _____” Bathing in the River Ganges on one of the six selected days is said to (i) _____ the sins of seven lifetimes.

An unexpected (j)_____ of rain last weekend helped to douse the (k)_____ which have been raging in New South Wales for the past. Around 45 mm of rain fell in the space of only eight hours, (l)_____ many of the fires which have devastated 740,000 acres of (m)_____ in the Blue Mountain area, and have (n)_____ the suburbs of Sydney, causing the evacuation of over 5,000 people. No lives have been lost, but the fires have killed thousands of sheep, and driven (o) _____ insects and snakes into the nearby city. Animal (p)_____ workers fear that the local wildlife populations will take many years to recover. ¹

¹ Taken from: Cutting Edge Advanced. Pag. 15.

PART 2 – Interpretive Level

Please do not write on this booklet. Write your answers on the answer sheet

Listen to a conversation about ways to learn a foreign language and answer the questions.

1) From the content of the conversation, where does this interview take place?

- A. at a public forum
- B. in an auditorium
- C. on TV
- D. in a classroom

2) According to Dr. Adams, what is one of the most important points in learning a foreign language?

- A. Exposing oneself to the target culture
- B. Attending regularly a good language program
- C. Coming up with a study plan
- D. Developing good note-taking skills

3) Dr. Adams suggests that:

- A. A realistic goal for learners is to reach a certain level of language proficiency, not native fluency.
- B. Students can achieve native-like pronunciation through focused study.
- C. Learners should interact with native speakers to gain greater fluency.
- D. Teachers need to help students foster a good self-esteem and confidence.

4) What kinds of activities would help Dr. Adams in his own study?

- A. Listening to information and then discussing it with others
- B. Reading books and magazines for news
- C. Being involved in group or class projects
- D. Keeping a journal and exchanging with a friend

5) Which point was NOT mentioned in the interview?

- A. Many learners often favor a combination different learning styles.
- B. Pronunciation practice is key to improved comprehensibility.
- C. Setting reachable goals should be paramount in learning.
- D. Learning is a step-by-step process.¹

¹ Taken from: *Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab* - . <http://www.esl-lab.com/learn/learnrd1.htm>

PART 3 – Critical Level

Write on the answer sheet ONLY your comments to be orally supported. DO NOT write a text.

You will watch two videos¹ and hear three people talking about a specific topic. Dr. Dawkins British, evolutionary biologist and popular science author, pastor Douglas Wilson, evangelical pastor and Christopher Hitchens contributing editor, Vanity Fair.

Listen to the interviews and answer the following questions orally.

- What are the speakers' positions towards the topic?
- Express your agreement or disagreement with one of the positions above. Support your ideas.

¹ Videos taken from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kTZONI546c>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PgAjXw1GdCw>

PART 4 – Aural Comprehension Level of Development

Please do not write on this booklet. Write your answers on the answer sheet

You will hear a radio interview¹ about a prize-winning teacher. Listen to the interview and answer the questions. Read all the questions before you start listening. You should listen to the audio twice.

1. What do we learn about Robert Haycraft?

- a. He is a teacher with a very good reputation.
- b. He got an award for a book about teaching.
- c. He is a government official responsible for education.
- d. He is a journalist with a special interest in teaching.

2. How fierce was the competition for the award this year?

- a. There was surprisingly little competition.
- b. There was more competition than usual.
- c. There were one or two other strong candidates.
- d. There were a lot of strong candidates.

3. What is the point of the story about the fish?

- a. To show how important fish is for young brains.
- b. To explain why fishmongers love Liddell too.
- c. To illustrate how original Liddell's style is.
- d. To suggest Liddell's closeness to his own parents.

¹ Taken from: <http://www.examenglish.com/LTE/listening5.php> Pearson Test of English General (formerly London Test): Listening level 5 practice test

4. What is Liddell's main subject?

- a. Math.
- b. Sport.
- c. Biology.
- d. Chemistry.

5. What did Liddell use to teach children about catalysts?

- a. A sweet.
- b. A doll.
- c. A small kid.
- d. A firework.

6. What was the main reason why Liddell won the award?

- a. His ability to teach a range of different subjects.
- b. His memorable performances in the classroom.
- c. His focus on children as individuals.
- d. His involvement in other schools in his area.

7. Why does Liddell require his pupils to learn the numbers in Japanese?

- a. To check pupil's learning ability.
- b. To compare how quickly each pupil can do it.
- c. To find out pupils prefer to learn.
- d. To make an initial strong impression on the class.

8. What influenced Liddell's distinctive approach?

- a. A difficult class he had to teach.
- b. Something he read when training.
- c. A teacher from his own childhood.
- d. Other teachers in his first school.

9. What aspect of Liddell's style has particularly struck the head teacher?

- a. His popularity with former pupils.
- b. His interest in teaching theory.
- c. His determination to involve all pupils.
- d. His enthusiasm for his subject.

10. What does Liddell say about teaching in his own school-days?

- a. It bored him.
- b. It was not appropriate for many of the pupils.
- c. It was suitable for pupils who would become miners.
- d. It was very advanced for its time.

Appendix 4



UNIVERSIDAD INDUSTRIAL DE SANTANDER
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SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES
ELT PROGRAM

ANSWER SHEET

PART1

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____
- g. _____
- h. _____
- i. _____
- j. _____
- k. _____
- l. _____
- m. _____
- n. _____
- o. _____
- p. _____

PART 2

- 1. a. b. c. d.
- 2. a. b. c. d.
- 3. a. b. c. d.
- 4. a. b. c. d.
- 5. a. b. c. d.

PART 3

Topic: _____

Position 1:

Position 2:

Position 3:



PART 4

1. a. b. c. d.

2. a. b. c. d.

3. a. b. c. d.

4. a. b. c. d.

5. a. b. c. d.

6. a. b. c. d.

7. a. b. c. d.

8. a. b. c. d.

9. a. b. c. d.

10.a. b. c. d.

Appendix 5

ANSWER KEY

PART 1 – Literal Level

- a. gather on the banks
- b. religious festival
- c. falling to earth
- d. believed to confer
- e. living lives
- f. richly-decorated
- g. largest religious
- h. on earth
- i. wipe away
- j. downpour
- k. bushfires
- l. putting out
- m. bushland
- n. threatened
- o. poisonous
- p. welfare

Part 2 – Interpretive Level

1. c. *On TV*
2. c. *Coming up with a study plan*
3. a. *A realistic goal for learners is to reach a certain level of language proficiency, not native fluency.*
4. c. *Being involved in group or class projects*
5. b. *Pronunciation practice is key to improved comprehensibility.*

PART 3 – Critical Level

Topic: ATHEISM

Position 1: Dr. Dawkins, British evolutionary biologist and popular science author.

He believes that God is energy, and that he exists in everything we see, especially nature. However, he states that God is not an entity that can be perceived by the human eye, and therefore people should not focus their belief on one person or divine presence, but on the creation.

Position 2: Evangelical Pastor Douglas Wilson

He states that God is real, and invites people to strongly believe in him.

Position 3: Christopher Hitchens, editor of Vanity Fair

His position towards the topic is neutral. He believes that God exist, but does not adore him as a religious person does.

PART 4 - Aural Comprehension Level of Development Test

Express your agreement or disagreement with one of the positions above. Support your ideas.

1. *b.*
2. *d.*
3. *c.*
4. *d.*
5. *a.*
6. *c.*
7. *c.*
8. *a.*
9. *c.*
10. *b.*

Appendix 6

Exam Matrix

Developmental levels of listening	Number of questions	Right answers	Score
1. Literal level	16		100%
2. Interpretive level	5		100%
3. critical level – TOPIC : 10%			100%
Position 1: 30 %			
Position 2: 30 %			
Position 3: 30 %			

Question	Degree of difficulty
1	Easy
2	Easy
3	Medium
4	Easy
5	Hard
6	Medium
7	Hard
8	Medium
9	Hard
10	Hard

Appendix 7

Evaluation criteria

The researchers designed this evaluation criterion to establish what the subject must be able to when completing each individual listening task.

Literal level

- Hearing and comprehending the actual physical awareness of sounds and language caused by stimuli (words, verbal and nonverbal cues).
- Listener's ability to focus attention on the speaker or on the verbal and nonverbal language without becoming distracted; requires motivation, desire, and effort on the part of the listener

Interpretive level

- The process that listeners engage in as they assign meaning to the stimuli; depends upon prior knowledge of the topic and the language of the speaker, and the context of the listening situation, as well as on the listener's schema as it relates to the speaker's schema
- The selective storage of information in the listener's mind for retrieval at another time

Critical level

- The judgements made by the listener as a result of interpreting the speaker's ideas using critical thinking skills
- Includes evaluating, but refers to the expression of judgements and interpretations, as well as to seeking clarity of understanding
- Comprehension of the speakers' position towards the topic.
- Ability to express his/her own arguments compared to the speakers'

General test of English (upper intermediate level):

- Ability to comprehend the speaker's ideas and evaluate the message, determining the speaker's intention (discourse) along with a distinction between fact and opinion.

Appendix 8

Self –report

Transcription 1st meeting

Researcher: So the first question for you is... Ehmm... How did you feel about the first listening task which consisted of completing with the exact words you heard?

Subject: Well, I really **didn't feel good**

Researcher: Mmm jum ... (asserting) why?

Subject: Because, ehmm... I **wasn't able to fill all of the blank spaces?**

Researcher: Mmmm... (asserting) Ok, ehmm Did you find it difficult or easy to understand?

Subject: Well... that was so weird (laughs) because when I was listening I found that easy but, when I was trying to write, I don't know, **I got lost**

Researcher: Mmm... Ehmm... So... Do you think that ehmm filling in the spaces with the exact word you hear is demanding for you?

Subject: Yes.

Researcher: It is?

Subject: Yes.

Researcher: Ok, thank you.

Researcher: Ok, so now the second question is about the second listening task which was listening to a conversation; right? And try to find the correct answers, so, how did you find the activity, in general?

Subject: I really liked it, (laughs)

Researcher: Yes did you like it? Why?

Subject: Because I like that kind of activity about listening and... I... get ehmm I think that I could understand ehmm... every word so...

Researcher: What about the questions, Did you find them like understandable, comprehensible?

Subject: Yes, they were

Researcher: Ok, thank you.

Researcher: Ok, so, this question is related to the third activity, which is ehmm... watching a video; listening to 3 speakers, talking about a specific topic, and so on... What is the topic, and according to what you hear, what are they talking about?

Student: They are talking about atheism.

Researcher: Mhumm... (Asserting)

Researcher: Ok and the first person was Dr. Dawkins, yeah? What was his position about the topic?

Subject: He doesn't care about God so he say that people can do, can see or can say something, whatever they want while they have good reasons and he thinks that people shouldn't live lives like a Ehh... they are going to have another in the future, they have to live the present.

Transcription 2nd meeting

Researcher: Ok, how did you feel about this activity?

Subject: Ehmm...La verdad, la verdad, **no la entendí muy bien**, o sea es esa clase de conversación la que se me dificulta entender o sea: por ejemplo **las palabras comunes las entendía** pero o sea para enlazarlo con la **idea general** y como mientras uno hablaba el otro hablaba, o sea me perdí! Me perdí!

Researcher: ¿No entendiste la idea general, que pudiste captar?

Subject: Pues la idea general sí, pero no pude lograr o sea de juzgar la posición de cada uno de ellos. Estaba pensando en la persona que o sea que era lo q estaban diciendo más quien lo estaba diciendo.

Researcher: Who was the third speaker and what was he talking about?

Subject: Realmente me confundí, o sea es que... a mi me da la impresión que los dos estaban en la misma posición de defender la teoría de que Dios existe, pero

no sé, con el segundo empecé como a dudarlo pensé, o sea llegué a creer que había uno a favor y otro en contra.

Researcher: While you were listening to the speakers, what was happening in your mind?

Subject: Pues... estaba tratando de **entender palabra por palabra** de que decía, llegue a un punto de en que llegue a entender o sea un párrafo completo como un párrafo como cuatro oraciones 5 oraciones porque entendía absolutamente todas las palabras que él decía pero me **perdía cuando no era capaz de escucharle** que era lo que él decía entonces ahí me perdía completamente.

Researcher: Now, Can you express you disagreement or agreement with one of the positions above? And support you ideas please.

Subject: No, I cannot.

Researcher: Why?

Subject: I not feel good at, at this because when the woman started to talk I understand why... what she wanted to meet(find), yeah, that she said something like ehmm... she was talking about a movie that I'm not sure but I feel that they made? But she asked him about ehmm... she wants to that she played what for that movie? for that movie?(Insecure)

Appendix 9

TAXONOMIC ANALYSIS

- Not feeling good about the type of listening activity *is a result of* not being able to complete the listening task
- Not being able to complete the listening task *is a reason for* not feeling good about the type of listening activity
- Getting lost *is a result of* transcribing the message
- Understanding word by word *is a characteristic of* the participant's listening strategies
- Understanding word by word *is a way to* feel successful about the listening task
- Understanding word by word *is a way to* understand
- Understanding word by word *is a way to* gather and retain information
- Understanding common words *is a way to* understand
- Not understanding word by word *is a cause of* losing concentration
- Memorization *is a characteristic of* the participant's listening strategies
- Not linking the general idea to the speakers' position about the topic *is a cause of* getting lost
- Focusing on the message (word by word) instead on the speakers *is a characteristic of*
- Understanding what the speakers say *is the result of* understand word by word
- Losing concentration *is the result of* getting lost
- Not understanding while listening *is a cause of* getting lost
- Not understand word by word *is a cause of* losing concentration
- Lacking vocabulary *is a reason for* not understand

TAXONOMIC ANALYSIS CHART

