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Research Article

Listening Anxiety as a Disruption of Real-Time Processing in EFL Learning

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Abstract

Listening comprehension is increasingly conceptualized in the applied linguistic context as a complex, real-time cognitive process that operates within strict time constraints. Despite its central role in second and foreign language proficiency, listening remains a persistent source of difficulty for many learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Recent studies have become interested in affective variables, especially anxiety, as a key determinant of language performance, but listening anxiety has been underexamined topic, and researchers have tended to study it in terms of outcome measures such as test scores. This type of method provides little information about how anxiety operates during the listening process itself.

The cognitive-affective, process-based approach, which is taken in this paper, has redefined the concept of listening anxiety as an interference with real-time processing when listening in foreign languages. Referring to psycholinguistic theories of online understanding and cognitive theory of anxiety, this paper contends that listening anxiety poses a competition due to barriers on limited cognitive resources, attentional regulation, working memory overload, and disrupted coordination of bottom-up and top-down processing. These interruptions predispose the learners to a cascading breakdown in comprehension under temporal pressure.

The study also adds to the current trends in applied linguistics that emphasize dynamic, learner-centered, and mechanism-based explanations of language learning by refocusing analytical attention on the mechanisms of listening, rather than its outcome. The article contributes to a sophisticated conceptualization of listening anxiety in EFL situations and highlights the need for further research on listening anxiety as an integral component of real-time listening rather than as a peripheral affective variable.

Keywords

Listening anxiety; real-time processing; EFL listening; cognitive–affective interaction; applied linguistics; TESOL

1. Introduction

Listening comprehension has long been considered one of the pillars of second and foreign language proficiency since it offers ongoing access to the linguistic input and promotes the emergence of broader communicative competence. In EFL

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contexts, listening is often the primary channel through which learners are exposed to authentic spoken language beyond textbook input. It has a pivotal role in the vocabulary development, phonological sensitivity, and pragmatic awareness of learners, and it also indirectly influences the development of speaking as it enhances the input-output relationships in oral communication. Nevertheless, even with its importance, listening has continued to be a constant challenge for most EFL students. Although learners have been exposed to formal learning over a long period of time, the most frequent complaints that they experience are that spoken English is too fast, illegible, or untraceable, and that the issues are not merely a question of limited practice but are connected to more fundamental limitations in the way spoken input is decoded.

The conceptualization of listening in research on applied linguistics and second language acquisition (SLA) has changed significantly with time. Past perceptions typically placed listening as a receptive skill, which mainly entails decoding and comprehension tests, and empirical studies had often depended on outcome measures (e.g., test scores or post-listening questions). Later, listening has more recently been conceptualized as a cognitively demanding, time-constrained process. This interpretation can be congruent with the current descriptions of second language listening that include cognitive processing through the Internet, time urgency, and the ongoing structure of bottom-up and top-down tasks (Goh, 2018).

In that sense, comprehension is not a fixed product but an emergent state that is obtained as a result of various processes that need to be synchronized as quickly as possible: acoustic perception, speech stream segmentation, phonological decoding, lexical access, syntactic parsing, semantic integration, and discourse level interpretation. Most importantly, these operations take place online as the speech signal proceeds forward and the listener is given less time to compensate for missed cues. The processing in real-time is therefore very sensitive to interference. Even minor inefficiencies at a young age (e.g., slow word recognition) can lead to larger breakdowns, particularly when the listener cannot recover when the input has gained ground.

In addition to these cognitive reconceptualizations, the affective variables have reappeared in the limelight in the contemporary explanation of language learning. Although affect was considered as a secondary or contextual influence in earlier cognitive models, recent studies are paying more attention to the fact that cognitive processing and an affective experience are involved in systematic interactions. One of the most widely known affective factors that affects language performance is anxiety. Nevertheless, a considerable amount of the literature that has been developed so far has focused on speaking anxiety, test anxiety, or general foreign language anxiety. Listening anxiety, a more specific kind of anxiety that has a direct relationship with listening, has been relatively understudied,

and when it is treated, it is commonly referred to as a constant emotional condition or trait-like personality. Nevertheless, more recent research has also begun to operationalize language anxiety as an outcome of a dynamic, case-sensitive process that varies with different tasks and occasions of language use (Gkonou, Daubney, & Dewaele, 2017).

Such a dynamic view applies especially to the process of listening, which is experienced moment-by-moment, governed by severe real-time processing limitations (Goh, 2018; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Although such a characterization is helpful in itself as a starting point, it may inadvertently underpin the workings of anxiety in the context of listening. Real listening cases are dynamic: a situation of anxiety may develop when students feel that they are lagging behind, aggravate when a segment is missed, and subside when understanding is recovered. This implies that listening anxiety is not only to be considered as a background experience but as a process-focused phenomenon that varies over time and activity.

Another weakness of the current literature is the prevalence of outcome-based strategies. Numerous works analyze a correlation between anxiety scores and the listening test performance and introduce good evidence that anxiety is relevant, yet they do not say much about the way anxiety interferes with listening. That is, the outcome-based designs would be able to show that anxious learners tend to do worse, but they do not provide a complete answer as to how anxiety disrupts real-time understanding. The need to comprehend these processes lies in the need to formulate theoretically consistent explanations of EFL learning listening difficulty. It also coincides with larger-scale new tendencies in applied linguistics, which place more emphasis on process-based explanations, learner-focused approaches, and theoretically integrative frameworks linking cognitive processes with affective processes.

To address such gaps, the current paper focuses on a cognitive-affective process-based perspective to re-theoretize listening anxiety as a disruption of real-time processing in EFL listening. Instead of suggesting the methods of teaching or instructional interventions, the paper aims at theoretical clarification: it inquires how the concept of listening anxiety could be viewed as a factor that competes with the cognitive resources, destabilizes the attention control, overloads the working memory, and interferes with the process of bottom-up and top-down processing during online understanding. Placing the listening anxiety in the context of the architecture of real-time listening, the paper will make its contribution to the applied linguistics and TESOL studies on the conceptual level to provide an account that is more reflective of the temporal, dynamic, and interactional aspects

of listening that are evident in the EFL context.

2. Listening as a Real-Time Cognitive Process

2.1. Online comprehension and temporal constraints

Unlike many other language activities, listening is inherently time-bound. In naturalistic interaction, the flow of spoken input is continuous and virtually impermanent; the listener is not able to interrupt the speaker, backtrack, or reread any part. This is a temporal irreversibility that has significant cognitive implications.

This view aligns with earlier challenges to the traditional notion of listening as passive reception. Field (2008) argues that listening is an active and effortful cognitive process in which learners must continuously construct meaning under severe temporal constraints, rather than simply decode and store incoming sounds. Effective listening therefore requires that core processing operations occur rapidly enough to keep pace with the unfolding speech stream. When processing fails to align with the input, the listener risks losing access to subsequent information and may experience a sudden breakdown in comprehension.

From a psycholinguistic standpoint, real-time listening involves at least four broad layers of processing: (a) acoustic–phonetic perception and speech segmentation, (b) lexical access and recognition of words/phrases, (c) syntactic and semantic integration at clause and sentence levels, and (d) discourse-level interpretation that builds coherence across larger stretches of speech. These layers do not operate in strict sequence; rather, they interact dynamically, with partial hypotheses being formed and revised as new input arrives. This incremental nature means that comprehension is continuously updated, and breakdowns may occur when updates fail due to insufficient resources, delayed processing, or competing cognitive demands. From a cognitive validity perspective, such breakdowns cannot be adequately captured through post-listening test scores alone. Field (2013) emphasizes that valid accounts of listening comprehension must attend to the mental processes engaged during task performance, rather than relying solely on outcome-based measures.

2.1. The role of attention in speech tracking

Attention is central to real-time listening because the speech signal is dense and rapidly changing. Listeners must allocate attention to relevant cues (stress patterns, intonation, phoneme contrasts, word boundaries) while filtering distractions. In EFL contexts, attentional demands can be even higher because learners may not have fully automatized phonological representations and may need more conscious control to track acoustic detail. When attention is efficiently regulated, learners can maintain alignment with the speech stream and integrate information smoothly. When attentional regulation is compromised, learners may drift, miss key segments, and struggle to re-enter the flow of meaning.

Attentional control is also critical for balancing bottom-up and top-down processing. Bottom-up processing relies on decoding the acoustic signal into linguistic units, while top-down processing draws on background knowledge, context, and expectations to anticipate meaning. Skilled listening typically involves flexible coordination between these modes. If bottom-up processing is weak or delayed, top-down inference may compensate—yet inference itself requires cognitive control and confidence in one's interpretive hypotheses. Conversely, excessive reliance on top-down processing without accurate decoding can lead to misinterpretation. Therefore, the capacity to regulate attention and shift efficiently between bottom-up decoding and top-down integration is a defining feature of successful real-time listening.

2.2. Working memory and incremental integration

Listening is aided by working memory, which plays a short-term role in temporarily storing the partial segments of the input as they are combined with other parts to form greater units of meaning. An example is a listener who has to retain previous words in memory when syntactically resolving dependencies or in resolving referents.This function aligns with Baddeley's (2007) multicomponent model of working memory, which conceptualizes working memory as a limited-capacity system responsible for the temporary storage and manipulation of information during complex cognitive activities such as language comprehension. Since speech is an event that takes place within a very limited amount of time, working memory resources can be constantly revised: the old information should be remembered long enough to become integrated with the new input, though not too long, as that will overload available processing resources. Less automatic access to lexical information, slower syntactic processing, and increased intolerance to ambiguity tend to increase the burden of working memory in EFL listening.

This processing burden can be further explained by distinctions between controlled and automatic processing in second language use. McLaughlin (1990) argues that second language comprehension, particularly at lower or intermediate proficiency levels, relies heavily on controlled processing, which is slower, attention-demanding, and resource-intensive. When linguistic processes have not yet become automatized, learners must allocate substantial cognitive resources to basic decoding operations, leaving fewer resources available for

higher-level integration during real-time listening.

These constraints are further shaped by individual differences in working memory capacity, which interact with task demands and proficiency level to influence online comprehension efficiency (Wen & Skehan, 2021).

Real-time listening can thus be perceived as a cognitively costly process that demands fixed coordination of attention and working memory in a time-limited situation. This predisposes listening to interference by cognitive resources-consuming factors. The best candidate is anxiety, which may be accompanied by intrusive thoughts, self-monitoring, and a lower efficiency of cognitive control. In order to conceptualize listening anxiety in a process-oriented manner, one has to look not just at the emotional component of listening anxiety but also its functional implications on attention, working memory, and online integration. This process-oriented view of listening is also consistent with metacognitive accounts that emphasize learners' regulation of attention and comprehension during listening (Goh, 2018).

3. 3. Listening Anxiety in EFL Learning

3.1. From general language anxiety to listening-specific anxiety

Anxiety has long been recognized as a significant affective variable in second and foreign language acquisition. One of the most influential conceptualizations is foreign language classroom anxiety, defined by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) as a situation-specific form of anxiety arising from the unique demands of language learning contexts, particularly those involving communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety.

Subsequent research on language anxiety has tended to focus predominantly on speaking, largely because speaking is overtly performative and subject to immediate social evaluation. Listening, by contrast, is often perceived as a more private and receptive skill, which may partly explain why anxiety experienced during listening has received comparatively less scholarly attention. Nevertheless, learners frequently report high levels of anxiety during listening tasks, particularly in high-stakes situations such as examinations or when comprehension failure is interpreted as a threat to self-concept (Oteir & Aziz, 2017), such as perceptions of low language ability (e.g., 'I am not good at English').

Recent empirical studies have begun to investigate anxiety specifically associated with listening. For example, Oteir and Aziz (2017) reported that listening anxiety is strongly associated with lower listening comprehension performance among EFL learners, particularly in tasks involving rapid speech and limited processing time.

Several factors have been identified as potential triggers of listening anxiety, including perceived fast speech rate, unfamiliar accents, reduced forms, high lexical density, ambiguity, and fear of missing important information. Notably, listening anxiety is not merely a subjective feeling of uneasiness; it may manifest as physiological arousal (e.g., increased heart rate), cognitive worry (e.g., "I will fail this task"), and behavioral tendencies such as avoidance or disengagement. However, the ability of listening anxiety to affect the online processing of information cannot be fully described with a descriptive account of these symptoms. Learner variables, including affective factors such as anxiety, have been shown to play a critical role in second language listening comprehension (Vandergrift & Baker, 2015).

Building on this line of research, recent reviews of language anxiety have highlighted a conceptual shift away from viewing anxiety as a stable learner trait or a simple predictor of performance outcomes. MacIntyre (2017) argues that contemporary language anxiety research increasingly conceptualizes anxiety as a dynamic, context-sensitive phenomenon that fluctuates across tasks, time, and learning situations. This perspective underscores the importance of examining not only whether anxiety affects performance, but also how anxiety emerges and interacts with cognitive processes during actual language use.

3.2 Trait-like versus state-like conceptualizations

A key theoretical issue concerns whether listening anxiety is best viewed as stable (trait-like) or dynamic (state-like). Trait-like theories are those that deal with anxiety as a comparatively stable disposition: some learners are more anxious in different situations. State-like strategies focus on situational variability: anxiety varies with task difficulty, familiarity with the topic, perceived stakes, or temporary processing success. Real-time models of processing strongly imply that listening anxiety is state-dependent, since comprehension is a temporal process. A learner can start a task when he is relaxed, gets anxious when he/loses focus, and when he/regains focus, he/becomes calm. Therefore, the concept of listening anxiety can be interpreted as a dynamic variable that is rooted in the temporal process of processing. This dynamic perspective also suggests that anxiety does not go hand in hand with listening but is coterminal with that of understanding. As understanding becomes worse, anxiety can become worse, and when anxiety becomes worse, further deterioration of processing can occur. What comes about is a process of feedback where anxiety and breakdown in listening compound each other. The feedback loop provides a more theoretically rich description than other models, which have only considered anxiety as a background predictor of test

scores.

3.3. Measurement limits and the need for process-oriented accounts

Empirical studies on listening anxiety have extensively used questionnaires where learners are instructed to indicate the overall level of anxiety they experience during the process of listening. These tools are practical in generalizing patterns and making comparisons of groups, but they cannot be used to interpret real-time processes. The retrospective self-reports are not able to measure moment-to-moment changes and are likely to confound anxiety with perceived difficulty. Besides, students are not always capable of the task of introspection of how anxiety affects certain levels of understanding.

In a process-oriented account, it needs conceptual clarity with regard to the processes through which anxiety interferes with listening. This does not need complex technology, but it would need theoretical integration. Cognitive psychology provides a clear explanation of the effects of anxiety on attention and working memory. These explanations may shed some light on the role of anxiety in EFL listening by integrating them with real-time listening models.

4. Cognitive–Affective Interactions in Re-al-Time Listening

From a cognitive–affective perspective, anxiety is not merely an emotional reaction but a condition that directly interacts with cognitive processing mechanisms. In cognitively demanding tasks, affective states such as anxiety can modulate attentional control and working memory, thereby influencing performance in cognitively demanding tasks.

4.1. Anxiety as competition for limited cognitive resources

Cognitive theories of anxiety commonly emphasize that anxiety consumes resources needed for task performance. Anxiety is associated with worry, intrusive thoughts, and heightened self-monitoring, all of which draw on attention and working memory. This account is consistent with Attentional Control Theory, which posits that anxiety impairs the efficiency of attentional control by diverting cognitive resources away from task-relevant processing toward threat-related monitoring (Eysenck, Derakshan, Santos, & Calvo, 2007). In tasks that require rapid processing and continuous updating—such as listening—this competition for resources can be particularly damaging. The listener cannot pause the input; if processing resources are diverted, comprehension may fail before the listener has a chance to recover.

Importantly, the resource competition is not only quantitative (less capacity available) but also qualitative (less efficient control). Anxiety may impair the ability to allocate attention flexibly, inhibit irrelevant thoughts, or shift strategies. This is consistent with the observation that anxious listeners often become stuck: they fixate on missing a word, repeatedly replay it internally, and miss subsequent information. The disruption is therefore dynamic and cascading.

4.2. Attentional disruption and speech tracking failure

In real-time listening, attention is needed to track the speech stream, detect boundaries, and prioritize information. The anxiety can also cause a shift of attention of the speech signal to the internal monitor (I am failing, I am lost) and lead to less sensitivity to the incoming cues (Eysenck et al., 2007). Even the short-term attentional failures can be quite critical since the speech stream persists. When the listener overlooks a crucial part (e.g., a negation marker, discourse connector, or keyword), the understanding can be lost, and it can become hard to correct.

Attention can also be biased by anxiety to threat perception. The threat in listening is usually the risk of being misunderstood or losing face, especially when the learners anticipate being judged. The result of such bias may be hypervigilance (Paying too much attention to detail) or avoidance (tuning out). Hypervigilance can result in over-investment in decoding single words at the cost of global meaning, whereas avoidance can result in disengagement when the task becomes overwhelming. Both patterns interfere with bottom-up and top-down processing.

4.3. Working memory overload and fragmentation of meaning

Another way through which anxiety interferes with listening is working memory overload. When worry takes up working memory, then there is less to carry linguistic segments and combine them. It can lead to discontinuous understanding: students might know single words but not be able to construct coherent sentences and discourse models. Fragmentation mainly occurs with EFL listening, in which the lexical access can already be slower and syntactic parsing less automatic. These problems are exacerbated by anxiety, which further impacts the efficiency of working memory.

Fragments also tend to increase anxiety in a self-perpetuating cycle. With the breaking up of comprehension, learners sense failure; they feel failure, which in turn builds up more anxiety, which in turn builds up more

comprehension fragmentation. This cycle coincides with the reports of the learners that they cannot regain the thread once they get lost and cannot continue the previous stage, becoming more and more anxious. Process-wise, the interesting fact is that anxiety is not only related to poor performance but may also actively influence the course of understanding with time. Individual differences in working memory capacity further constrain real-time processing during listening, particularly under cognitively demanding conditions (Wen & Skehan, 2021).

4.4. Disruption of top-down support and reduced inferential flexibility

Top-down processing has the ability to fill in bottom-up gaps with the aid of context, world knowledge, and discourse expectations. Nevertheless, when top-down inference is effective, cognitive flexibility and confidence are needed: the listener has to be prepared to make hypotheses and change them when necessary.

Anxiety can hamper this flexibility by making the person scared of making mistakes and therefore become a rigid processor. Fearful listeners will find it challenging to formulate meaning, and instead, they will strive to figure out the meaning of every single word, which is hardly ever possible in real time. Alternatively, they can fail to deepen their inferences and provide sufficient supervision, thereby enhancing misconceptions.

Therefore, anxiety not only interrupts decoding and memory but also the strategic coordination of processing modes. The disruption observed here is holistic and helps to uphold the central thesis of the paper that listening anxiety should be viewed as a disruption of real-time processing architecture, but not as a generic emotional reaction that happens to accompany difficulty in listening.

5. Real-Time Processing Breakdown, Temporal Pressure, and Dynamic Variability

5.1. Temporal irreversibility as a core trigger of anx-iety

Temporal pressure is a defining characteristic of listening. Since input is complicated to revisit, mistakes in initial processing are easily spread. Whenever learners feel that processing speed does not match the input speed, that is, when they feel as though they are lagging behind, they are likely to be anxious. The idea of falling behind might be more dangerous in EFL experiences since the students tend to view it as a sign of low ability and not a usual outcome of the task difficulty.

The subjective experience of control is also determined by temporal pressure. With reading, the learners can pace themselves, reread, and accelerate reading. Pacing in listening is peripheral and is usually regulated by the speaker/recording. This is externally imposed pacing that may increase feelings of helplessness, particularly when the learners have gone through a series of failures. The perceived loss of control is not just an emotional experience but also affects the cognitive processing since the experience enhances the arousal and evokes attention to the threat-related monitoring.

5.2. Micro-breakdowns and cascading failure

Real-time listening breakdowns often begin with micro-failures: missing a word boundary, failing to recognize a key lexical item, or mishearing a reduced form. In non-anxious conditions, listeners may tolerate such micro-failures and continue processing, using context to repair meaning. Under anxiety, however, micro-failures can be treated as catastrophic. The listener may freeze, attempt to reconstruct the missed segment, and lose access to subsequent information. This produces cascading failure: one missed cue leads to multiple missed cues, and comprehension collapses.

Cascading failure helps explain why listening anxiety can be disproportionate to the objective difficulty of input. The problem is not only the complexity of speech but the interaction between complexity, temporal pressure, and anxiety-driven resource diversion. A process-based model, therefore, highlights trajectories rather than static outcomes: anxiety changes the path of comprehension, not merely the final score.

5.3. Dynamic systems perspective: variability across tasks and moments

One recent development in SLA studies is the realization that the variables among the learners are dynamic and dependent on the context. Listening anxiety can be well applied in this view. The anxiety differs between tasks (e.g., multiple choice questions and note taking), subjects (familiar and unfamiliar), accents (standard and non-standard), and perceived stakes (practice and assessment). Anxiety can also decrease and increase within a single moment of listening, with levels shooting up upon loss of comprehension and when the act is recovered.

Such variability implies that models that consider listening anxiety as a constant are likely to overlook key temporal dynamics. The dynamic view will make the researcher think about how difficulty in processing undergoes co-development with anxiety over time. It is also compatible with real-time processing models that are more focused on step-by-step

understanding. The theory of synthesis that is suggested here is that listening anxiety could be best treated as an emergent one: listening anxiety is a result of the interplay between task requirements, resources owned by the learner, and temporary states of comprehension, and listening anxiety, in turn, creates a perturbation in processing by disturbing attention and memory.

5.4. Listening anxiety as regulatory failure

One way to unify cognitive and dynamic perspectives is to conceptualize listening anxiety as a form of regulatory failure. In this account, successful real-time listening requires regulation of cognitive resources: allocating attention, managing working memory load, and maintaining strategic flexibility. Anxiety disrupts regulation by introducing competing goals (e.g., self-protection, fear of failure) that divert resources. The result is not simply "feeling nervous" but losing the capacity to regulate processing under temporal pressure. This regulatory framing is consistent with contemporary emphasis on self-regulation and metacognitive control in listening research, while remaining firmly within a research-oriented scope.

6. Theoretical Implications for Applied Linguistics and TESOL Research

6.1. Toward integrative models of listening that include affect

One of the implications of the suggested reconceptualization is that affective variables should become more explicit about cognitive models of listening. Traditional models tend to concentrate on perceptual decoding and linguistic integration, whereas affect is considered external. However, cognitive psychology evidence indicates that affect has a direct effect on attention, memory, and control processes. Anxiety can therefore be incorporated into listening models, and this will enhance explanatory power, especially in the EFL setting where processing resources are already limited.

An integrative model would consider anxiety as a variable that determines the efficiency of processing. Instead of making a simple linear prediction about the effects of comprehension, anxiety would be conceived as modulating the dynamics of processing: it would slow down the rate at which lexical access was facilitated, reduce the effectiveness of working memory, and decrease the flexibility with which top-down inference would be conducted. This method is in line with the new trends, which focus on mechanisms rather than description.

6.2. Reframing research questions: from scores to processes

The process-oriented view implies that research questions should be changed. Researchers can also ask how anxiety influences online processing pathways instead of simply asking whether anxiety is correlated with the results of listening tests. This involves research on when anxiety peaks during listening, the relationship between spikes and breakdown points, and how learners recover. Not necessarily with immediate pedagogical implications, such questions are theoretically useful, since they contribute to the conceptual development of listening difficulty.

It is also this reframing that promotes methodological diversification. Although this paper is theoretical in nature, it identifies the worth of time-sensitive designs, including repeated measures in activities, moment-by-moment self-report (where possible), finer-grained qualitative explanations of breakdown episodes, or process tracing methods. Notably, the process of adopting such approaches does not correspond to the application of teaching interventions; instead, it is a change in research towards mechanisms.

6.3. Context sensitivity and EFL-specific conditions

The proposed model is of particular interest to EFL classrooms, where students frequently lack exposure to diverse spoken input and must rely on classroom-based listening resources. In most cases of EFL, the input can be somewhat controlled, and learners might not be prepared for the variability in the language of real speech. This enhances the possibility of breakdown and, hence, anxiety. Therefore, listening anxiety can be an important factor, particularly in an EFL setting where the discrepancy between what is taught and what is actually spoken is high.

The contextual focus itself is a modern tendency in applied linguistics: instead of thinking of the universal mechanisms, scholars are paying more attention to the ways in which mechanisms can vary in different contexts. The theoretical relevance in this case is that it offers a perspective in which listening anxiety can be viewed as a process that is influenced

by EFL-specific temporal pressure, lack of automatization, and increased evaluative expectations.

6.4 Clarifying conceptual boundaries

Another implication concerns conceptual clarity: listening anxiety should be differentiated from related constructs such as general foreign language anxiety, test anxiety, or low self-efficacy. While these constructs overlap, listening anxiety is characterized by its temporal embedding in online comprehension. Its defining feature is not merely nervousness but disruption of real-time speech processing. Clarifying boundaries can strengthen construct validity in future research and reduce conceptual redundancy in the literature.

7. Conclusion

The current paper has presented an argument that listening anxiety in EFL learning must not be viewed solely as an emotional response but as a disruptive phenomenon, which disrupts real-time cognitive processing. Listening comprehension is a time-based, online task that requires steady coordination of attention, working memory, and free interaction between bottom-up and top-down processing. Anxiety also shares resources and competes with them, thus causing attention to be diverted, taking up working memory space, strategic flexibility, and increasing the effects of time pressure. The consequence is that it becomes more vulnerable to processing failure, and it can tend to cause a cascading failure once the understanding starts to unravel.

The paper transcends the outcome perspective, which is outcome-based and retrospective, to one that is cognitive-affective and process-oriented. It rather points out the anxiety of listening as a dynamic process that varies as one listens and covaries with the state of comprehending. It is in line with new trends in the studies of applied linguistics and TESOL that focus on the learner-centered view, explanation in terms of mechanisms, and the dynamic description of language learning processes.

In general, the placement of the listening anxiety in the context of the real-time processing theories offers a more theoretically sound explanation of the reasons why EFL students are struggling with listening despite having the appropriate linguistic knowledge. The model offered here provides a sophisticated conceptual framework that future studies can use to capture time- and interaction-based aspects of listening comprehension, and the model would facilitate continued academic endeavors of merging cognitive and affective aspects in the unified explanation of EFL listening. The perspective of listening anxiety as a real-time processing phenomenon is aligned with the current trends in theoretical research, which focus on the dynamic and time-sensitive essence of L2 listening (Goh,2018; Gkonou et al., 2017).

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Form
ACT	Attentional Control Theory
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
FLA	Foreign Language Anxiety
FLCAS	Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
WM	Working Memory

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