

LISTENING ANXIETY AND THE SOLUTIONS TO INHIBIT ITS NEGATIVE EFFECTS

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Abstrak

Kemampuan menyimak dalam bahasa Inggris adalah kemampuan yang tidak mudah dikuasai oleh semua siswa yang bukan penutur asli bahasa tersebut. Kemampuan ini harus didukung oleh penguasaan kosakata bahasa Inggris yang baik, mengaitkan makna kata dan frase bahasa Inggris dengan konteks topik pembicaraan sehingga dapat menyimpulkan dengan benar isi pembicaraan yang disimak, mengikuti kecepatan berbicara penutur asing dan aksen berbicara yang berbeda-beda, memahami konteks struktur tata bahasa yang biasa dipergunakan dalam bentuk lisan percakapan bahasa Inggris, serta pengetahuan dasar yang dimiliki terkait topik pembicaraan materi yang disimak. Jika semua hal tersebut tidak dikuasai oleh siswa, salah satu dampak yang akan muncul adalah rasa cemas, takut dan khawatir atau dikenal dengan istilah *listening anxiety*. *Listening anxiety* harus diantisipasi dan diatasi dengan strategi yang tepat salah satunya dengan menerapkan teknik *bottom-up* pada proses pengajaran sehingga efek negatif dari *listening anxiety* dapat diminimalisir secara signifikan.

Kata kunci : *listening, anxiety, listening anxiety, bottom-up technique*

I. INTRODUCTION

Listening is a skill in which we can find complexity in it since it requires students to be supported by some crucial abilities such as; understanding many difficult and unfamiliar English words, ability to understand many phrases, clauses and sentences literally or through different contexts. Other things that the students should notice that they have to be able to understand different kinds of speakers' accent, differentiating different intonation and stressing pattern the speakers used which cause different meaning sometimes,

following the rate of speaking delivery of the speakers, and recognizing different diction used by the speakers which sometimes also bring different meaning too. The complexity in listening has made this skill claimed as one of difficult skills in English. Listening has been reported to be a difficult skill due to the features inherent in oral input such as phonological and lexical features (Flowerdew, 1994) in Pan (2016 : 12). Listening can be difficult for some learners for some listeners due to their limited processing skill (Buck, 2001) and lack of control over the rate of speech (Osada, 2004), or inadequate knowledge of

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vocabulary, topics and accents (Buck, 2001) in Pan (2016:12). Because of its complexity, listening causing the students suffered anxiety in the class. This phenomenon especially occurred to EFL students and those who still having some problems related to language components in English. Listening comprehension complexity can frequently cause irritation and anxiety among second or foreign language learners (Graham, 2006) in Pan (2016:12).

Anxiety is a feeling of worry, uneasiness, and fear of something. Anxiety arises because of someone's stress, nervousness, and fear. According to Spielberger (1983 : 1) in Pan (2016 : 12) anxiety is the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system. Moreover, Arnold and Brown (1999 : 8) in Pan (2016 : 12) state, "anxiety is associated with negative feelings such as uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension, and tension. Meanwhile, anxiety in language learning situation deals with the feeling of worry and afraid of learning English skills, such speaking, writing, listening, and reading. Anxiety in English skill mostly happened toward EFL students who do not use English for daily communication and use it as second language. Meanwhile, one of

anxiety appear in language class is listening anxiety.

Listening class can be stressful and it can be the trigger of anxiety. If the students do not aware of some listening difficulties they face during learning, it is possible that it can diminish their interest to learn and increase their anxiety. Some listening difficulties often found by the students are; discriminating the sound, recognizing words and its meaning, recognizing different diction used by the speaker, time consumed when dealing with listening test, and relating the students' prior knowledge to the topic of spoken English heard.

First, discriminating the sounds. English has many phonemes with different sounds. Each phoneme should be pronounced differently. The effect of variation in the sound of the phonemes will result in different meaning when different phonemes are joined together into a lot of words. The students who are not familiar with this kind of thing can be confused when they are listening to some phonemes which as if they have the same pronunciation, but they have different meaning. As a result, sometimes the students misinterpret the meaning of the words and sentences that they hear.

Second, recognizing words and its meaning. It can be denied that the richness of native speakers' vocabulary require nonnative students to hardly understand the

meaning context behind those words. Because many words used by native speakers are sometime not familiar with the students, they often face the obstacle to understand the gist of what native speakers said. In addition, the knowledge of words spelling make the condition getting worse. Anytime the students find difficult words in spoken English and they can hardly find the meaning on dictionary since they do not know exactly the spelling of the words, it make them getting confused and easily depressed. As a result, it becomes one of barriers in mastering listening skill.

Third, recognizing different diction used by the speakers. Different speakers from different countries usually will use different accent. The difference in accent will influence the choosing of certain words too. For example, the speakers who speak with American English will use the word “apartment” instead of the word “flat” used by the speakers with British English. If the students do not realize this matter, they sometimes getting confused of the word “flat” and they think that the word “flat” is a new and difficult word for them.

Fourth, time consumed when dealing with listening test. Listening test requires the fast thinking since the spoken English produced by the speakers will not be stopped until the last part of the test have been heard by the students. If the students are not ready with the test material and they

get panic easily, it will cause them to loose much details from the listening material they hear. As a result, it affects the result of the test. Furthermore, it increases their anxiety since they get stressed because they fail to listen the material successfully.

Fifth, understanding the topic and the content of spoken English with its details by elaborating the students’ prior knowledge and connecting it to the context of talk and English discourses that they hear. In short, students often miss their prior knowledge which related to the topic spoken to be used as something that can diminish their difficulty in understanding listening material. When dealing with the test the students often too focus on listening to every single words they do not understand, but they do not realize that they have prior knowledge that can help them to understand the material they listen to.

Those difficulties above cause the students to have a mindset that listening is difficult and it is hard to defeat it. It causes anxiety to come into their mind. The reasons of listening anxiety might be attributed to the problematic nature of listening (Christenberry, 2003), nature of the speech, level of difficulty, lack of clarity, lack of visual support, lack of repetition, spontaneous speech, fast speech, and an unfamiliar accents/topics (Vogely, 1998) in Pan (2016:12). Psychologically anxiety is one of the psychological factor

influences to someone's success of his or her second language acquisition. Anxiety can be language barriers for the students whose anxiety is higher than their motivation, interest, spirit, and self esteem. Anytime they feel anxious in listening class and they let this condition dominates the situation, it is possible that the anxiety itself will affect to their achievement. Meanwhile, if they still can manage the anxiety inside themselves, probably the negative effect of anxiety can be diminished as long as they still have motivation to defeat their negative feeling and increase their encouragement to fight the anxiety. In this case, the students need optimal support whether from the teacher and important people around them as well as the environment where they live.

Relating to introductory explanation previously, this article will discuss further about anxiety in general with its types and listening anxiety. Lastly, some solutions to overcome this problem will also elaborated.

II. THEORY REVIEW

1. Listening Skill and Its Problems

Listening is a skill which involves the process of receiving, understanding and analyzing the message from spoken talk delivered. Underwood (1989) in Villegaz (2013, p.13) state that listening is the process we focus on someone said to us in

order to get the gist of what he or she said. Listening in English is an activity which attempts to find and understanding message and information from various English discourses. This skill needs concentration, some abilities related to some language components in English, the awareness of knowing the topic as well as the context related to the topic and using background knowledge to make listening process runs smoothly.

Listening also requires students to understand, memorize and to think fast since the material delivered by the speakers run fast. Anytime the students forget and miss on a certain part of spoken material, it will be impossible to listen it again except the time for repetition is still permissible. Therefore, students should have good time management whether in the time when they practice their listening in the class or when they are having listening examination. Good time management will avoid the students to get stuck only on one part of listening material, but they can focus on each part of listening material they hear. Focusing only on one difficult part of listening material will spend much time and not effective. Meanwhile, there are still other parts of listening which should be heard and understood. Furthermore, the difficulties found on listening material can be stressful which sometimes make students confused and they will think about this part

over and over. Meanwhile, the time keep running. As a result, the students miss much information from it. This case should be avoided in order the students especially EFL students can listen effectively to the spoken English and the difficulties in listening will not affected them significantly.

According to Goh (2000) in Shteiwi and Hamuda (2016:114),

some stressful difficulties often found by the students are; recognizing sounds as distinct words or group of words, developing a coherent mental representation of word heard, problems related to utilization in which difficulty to understand the intended message of the speaker, the students quickly forget of what they heard as soon as they start to listen to other part of listening, the students are not able to recognize the meaning of familiar words they know and recall the meanings and they can hardly find the message behind that words, the students understand the words but not the intended message and the inferences through that words.

Generally, based on some difficulties exposed above, understanding the meaning of words and making connection among the words, the context of the topic talked, and the intended message is the basic problem for the students. Meanwhile, the speed of the students to follow the material spoken also contribute to their problem. In line

with some difficulties suffered by students in listening class, based on the research finding obtained from a research upon the first year students of second semester majoring in English from Almajmah College of Education, Saudi Arabia, Yousif (2006) in Shteiwi and Hamuda (2016:114) mention that the problems faced by the students are limited vocabulary, they have difficult listening task and lecture and can hardly understand lengthy connected speech, rate of delivery, environmental variable such as temperature, and the last is boredom and frustration. If we compare to the previous difficulties mentioned before, the same points are on the difficulties related to unfamiliar and difficult words and rate of delivery.

Continuing discussion about some difficulties and problems had by students, underwood (1989) in Chen (2005:2) point outs some listening problems which are; lack of control of the speakers' speech, not being able to get things repeated, limited vocabulary, failure to recognize the "signals", problem of interpretation, inability to concentrate, establish learning habit. Similarly to the problems mentioned before, the basic problems are on getting the meaning of words and make its interpretation and adapting to speech delivery from the speaker. Meanwhile, other problems are varied based on differences of learners' ability, cultural

background, environmental background and learners' background knowledge. Underwood (1989) in Chen (2005:3) argue that these problems related to learners' different backgrounds, such culture and education. Students whose culture and education are often exposed to habit in storytelling and oral communication tend to have better listening comprehension compared to those who less exposed to listening to storytelling and oral communication.

Referring to many problems often found in listening class there must be certain effect toward the students. The common and direct effect is the feeling of afraid, worry and unconfident on the learning. The insufficient support from teacher and other important people, lack of knowledge related to listening, lack of facilities and lack of practices make the effect to be worse. As a result commonly the students will feel anxious. They have anxiety on their mind and it influences to their learning achievement. Discussion related to anxiety will further discussed on the next part of this article.

2. Listening Anxiety

Anxiety frequently becomes obstacle for nonnative students when they learn four skills in English including listening. The negative feeling of learning second language appears on students' perception

when they are not ready to manage some problems arise in the classroom. The individual capability related to some language aspects also contribute to this kind of negative feeling when the students having less knowledge and ability in their language components. Lack of facilities supporting the learning influences to the students' comfort too. Meanwhile, support from teacher, parents and others also significant toward the negative feeling they have. The more sufficient attention and support they obtain from those people among them, the less negative feeling come into their mind and vice versa. The negative feeling itself related to the feeling of afraid, worry and uneasiness toward the learning and it is known as anxiety. Anxiety has been proven to be negatively correlated to students' achievement. Many researchs (e.g., Bailey, 1983; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Young, 1991) in Cui (2011 : 875), especially in western countries, has been conducted to find the relationship between anxiety and achievement in the learning of different foreign languages. Most studies (e.g., Horwitz, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994) in Cui (2011 : 875) arrive at a conclusion that anxiety and achievement are negatively correlated. In China, many researchs have been conducted also upon students of high school whose English proficiency level is low. High School

students, who are still at a comparatively low level of English proficiency and thus more easily experience a feeling of uneasy suspense (Rachman, 1998) in Cui (2011 : 875).

Psychological literature defines anxiety as an emotional state analogous to fear (Sweeney & Pine, 2004) in Avci (2017 : 98). Besides, anxiety, among the other types, may involve learning anxiety (feeling anxious in the process of learning) and second/foreign language anxiety (connected with the application of a second/foreign language) (Brown, 2000; MacIntyre & Gregerson, 2012) in Avci (2017:98). Anxiety in foreign language/second language learning often found and a common thing happen in foreign/second language learning context. A factor which has been found to be a major challenge to English as a foreign language (EFL) learners is language anxiety (Brown:2007) in Oteir & Aziz (2017: 114). Meanwhile, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994 : p.24) define language anxiety as 'the feeling of tension and apprehension, specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning. One of the anxiety in foreign/second language context is listening anxiety. Among other types of language anxieties, listening anxiety has been found a distinctive type, however, closely related to general language anxiety (Elkhafaifi, 2005) in Avci (2017:98).

Anxiety in listening appears because of some extreme factors such as less knowledge of difficult and unfamiliar words, less concentration because negative feeling which obstruct understanding process of difficult words, connecting words, phrases and clauses into a meaningful and intended clear meaning based on the context, following delivery rate of speakers, and lack of prior knowledge of topic discussed on spoken material. Generally, anxiety can block the students to learn maximally if the anxiety felt is harmful anxiety. It can diminish students' confidence and self-esteem which contribute to the decrease of the students' performance and achievement. The anxiety becomes the mental block which reduce the students' encouragement to maximize the comprehensive input for their learning progress. This block, called 'the affective filter' might be because 'the acquirer is unmotivated lacking in self-confidence, or anxious (Krashen, 1985, p.3) in Xu (2011:1709). In addition, many researchers have discussed the effect of listening comprehension anxiety and found that listening comprehension anxiety affects learners' performance, achievement, and self-confidence levels (Elkhafaifi, 2005; Kim, 2000; Serraj and Noordin, 2013) in Oteir and Aziz (2017 : 115).

Other researchs also contributed to the fact that listening anxiety often occurs

and brings negative impact. Studies on listening comprehension found that listening skill is a problematic area for EFL learners (Brown, 2007; Hamouda, 2013; Hayati, 2010) in Oteir and Aziz (2017 : 115). In line with that explanation, Assaf (2015) in Oteir and Aziz (2017 : 116) classifies listening comprehension problems of Arab EFL learners into semantic, syntactic and external factors such as listening Quality. For further elaboration, research in Saudi Arabia have discovered almost the same problems of listening comprehension as those found in other Arab countries such as speed rate, anxiety, unfamiliar vocabulary and strange accents (Hamouda, 2013) in Oteir and Aziz (2017 : 116).

Language proficiency of learners' have been proved to be positively and negatively correlated to listening anxiety. Kim (2000) in Oteir and Aziz (2017 : 117) found that proficiency in language of learners correlates negatively to foreign language listening anxiety which means that when language proficiency increases, listening comprehension anxiety getting lower. Similarly with Kim's research finding, Elkhafaifi (2005) in Oteir and Aziz (2017 : 117) prove that both negatively related to learners achievement in which when foreign language listening getting higher, the learners' achievement is increased. Theoretically and practically,

listening anxiety affects to students' progress and achievement. Otherwise, the anxiety is not always a very serious obstacle in language learning context. If the anxiety diminished by the positive thinking of the students themselves that they can manage their anxiety by having stronger effort in increasing their ability and knowledge of the foreign language they learn as well as the optimal support by the teacher and facility, the listening anxiety will have less impact on the students. The case in which the anxiety will not give tremendous impact because it still can be managed through some solutions called as facilitative anxiety. Meanwhile, the anxiety which gives absolute negative effect toward the students called as debilitating anxiety. Scovel (1978 : 134) in Fauziati (2008 : 79) distinguishes anxiety into two types which are debilitating and facilitative anxiety.

2.1. Debilitative Anxiety

Debilitative anxiety tends to have negative effect toward the students. Commonly the students who have less language proficiency, unconfident, and lack optimal support from teachers, parents and friends will feel more significant anxiety. Managing debilitating anxiety is more difficult than managing facilitative anxiety. Positive views and judgement from the teachers toward the students will encourage them to have more positive feeling. This

will increase their self-confidence, motivation to learn and decrease the debilitating effect of anxiety (Song, 2005) in Avci (2017 : 99). In the attempt to reduce debilitating anxiety the students need optimal support from the people whom they communicate frequently at the classroom. Nevertheless, the motivation inside the students themselves which can significantly encourage them to have effort to defeat this anxiety.

Students who are not accustomed to communicate to foreign language or at least the environment where they learn and communicate everyday give exposure to second or foreign language communication will hardly manage debilitating anxiety. The less practice they do in communicating in English, the more anxiety they obtain. Fauziati (2008 : 79) states, “debilitative anxiety, on the other hand, motivates the learners to ‘flee’ the new learning task. It stimulates the individual emotionally to adopt avoidance behaviour.

2.2. Facilitative Anxiety

Facilitative anxiety considered to give a rather good effect toward the students. This anxiety stimulates the students to fight the difficulties come from the second or foreign language they learn. Alpert and Haber (1960) in Piniel and Csizer (2013 : 527) state that there is difference between facilitating and debilitating effects of

anxiety: facilitating enhances performances, whereas debilitating anxiety inhibits it. Beyond their fear and worry, the students tend to have attempt to manage the anxiety by doing more effort to learn the language. Fauziati (2008 : 79) states, “helpful anxiety, then, relate to some concern or apprehension over a particular task to be accomplished. It is a positive factor. Some of the early researchs suggest that a certain amount of anxiety can actually help learners’ performance in the classroom (Scovel, 1978) in Ebrahimi (2013 : 182). For example, Kleinmann (1977) in Ebrahimi (2013 : 182) reports positive correlations between facilitating anxiety and the use of more difficult linguistic structures. Facilitative anxiety can give more stimuli for the students to fight toward language difficulties and problems. Besides, the support from teacher and other significant factors will make them defeat this anxiety easier.

Both facilitative and debilitating anxiety should be overcome to inhibit the more bad impact toward students’ achievement. Some solutions reated to good teaching insruction, good or at least sufficient learning facilities should be provided, optimal support from the teacher, effective method or strategy or technique the teacher use, and effective learning activities which creates enjoyable learning athmospere. In the next part of the article,

some solutions to diminish and overcome problem of anxiety especially in listening anxiety will be further discussed.

3. Solutions to Overcome The Negative Effect of Listening Anxiety.

Ideally learning English as foreign or second language should bring fun and enjoyable atmosphere so that it will not felt as burden for the students whose language proficiency is poor. Preparing the material delivered and appropriate teaching method should be based on students' need. Learning activities given have to help the students to understand the material easily.

Based on literature analysis (Horwitz, 1988; Kunt, 1997; Lockhart, 1996; Mori, 1999; Truitt, 1995; Vibulphol, 2004, Wang, 1996) in Avci (2017 : 99), there are some ways how teacher can reduce foreign language listening anxiety by concerning some things as follows; teachers' positive regard on target language, teachers' positive regard on listening material and activities, unconditional positive regard on students' abilities to improve their FL listening skills, teachers' theoretical views, students-centered democratic education, participatory learning, communicative views on language teaching, constructivist views on education, views on error as natural part of learning, formative assessment as natural part of learning.

One of ways among others is teachers' positive regard on listening material and activities. The goal of it is the increase of students' involvement in learning. The material taught should be delivered using the method or strategy or technique which can create a nice learning situation so that students are more interested to learn and having more participation in class discussion. Besides, the other thing should be noticed is unconditional positive regard on students' ability to improve their FL listening skills. By giving positive value for the students in the attempt to improve their listening skill, it is hoped that it creates positive learning atmosphere, increase students' self-efficacy, and diminish students' anxiety. Among some ways mentioned previously, applying the effective technique suits to students' need and ability is using bottom-up technique. This technique considered effective and helpful to encourage students understand learning material by focusing on understanding important words and phrases and interpret its meaning related to the context so that the intended message produced by the speakers can be obtained easier.

3. 1. Bottom-up Technique

Bottom-up technique is a technique in which the students try to comprehend spoken material started from the smallest

parts to the whole (for example, by catching some important key words and phrases used in the material). Nation and Newton (2009, p. 40) states, “these are the processes the listener uses to assemble the message piece-by-piece from the speech stream, going from the parts to the whole”. Meanwhile, Brown (2007, p. 312) states, “Bottom-up processing proceeds from sounds to words to grammatical relationships to lexical meaning, etc., to a final message”. In the using of Bottom-up technique the students do not depend on their schematic knowledge, the knowledge related to the topic of the material, but they focus more on understanding the meaning of words as the small parts then they combine it to the phrases, clauses heard background-information for the interpretation of the text”.

Lynch and Mendelsohn (2002, p. 207) in Nation and Newton (2009, p. 41) state that there are some targets of Bottom-up technique which are distinguishing similar sounds, processing fast speech, processing stress and intonation differences, processing the meaning of discourse marker. Furthermore, what makes Bottom-up technique to be simpler than top-down technique is the process in which the students try to decode the spoken material. Decoding is the process in which the students try to separate piece by piece of a lot of words and phrases in the spoken

material. Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011, p. 979) state, “it acknowledges that listening is the process of decoding the sounds, from the smallest meaningful units (phonemes), to complete text. From that statement it can be inferred that phonemes are connected to form words, words are connected to form phrases, phrases are connected to form clauses and as the final result of those combination is the intended message of the whole thing on the material heard. They do not depend on their schematic knowledge which is the knowledge related to the topic of speech events heard by them. Sometimes it is difficult for the students who do not possess knowledge of new thing just because they never heard or learnt it before. Moreover, a lot of new and difficult words will become the obstacles for the students to understand the message of the spoken material if they just count on their schematic knowledge. It is why Bottom-up technique can be the simpler and efficient technique that can help the students to catch the gist or the message of the material by knowing and understanding the meaning of words and phrases used in the material. Besides, there is a basic principle that makes bottom-up technique to be beneficial for nonnative students in learning English which is the problems to understand the words which are not their L1 words. Some researchs have proved so in which; over the years, it has been apparent that L2 learners

commonly experience difficulties with many areas of their comprehension, especially in aspects of their bottom-up processing, for listeners, specifically, those bottom-up difficulties lie mainly in understanding the words in connected speech (e.g., Field, 2008a; Goh, 2000) in Yeldham (2018 : 805). In other studies, a bottom-up skills approach was also found to outperform a control group (Siegel & Siegel, 2015), in Yeldham (2018 : 807), as was an interactive approach, which involved teaching learners in the experimental group both listening strategy and bottom-up skills (Graham & Macaro, 2008) in Yeldham (2018 : 807).

Relating to the beneficial influence of bottom-up technique, some other researchs have been conducted to prove the significant benefit from bottom-up technique. Khuziakhmetov and Porchesku (2016 : 1997) found that the bottom-up approach involves listening exercises which develop bottom-up processing helping learners to recognize individual words, sentences, and clause divisions recognize key linguistic features of the words and sentences. In other research Govorun (2015) in (Khuziakhmetov & Porchesku : 1997) found out that when learners are given a choice what strategy to use, at lower levels of L2 proficiency they prefer bottom-up strategies to arrive at the meaning of an aural input. Considering a lot

of benefit from bottom-up technique, it can be applied in the classroom to be one of solutions to enhance students' listening skill by decreasing listening anxiety which can inhibit their achievement.

III. CONCLUSION

Listening anxiety cannot be denied as something which inhibits students' achievement. It can ruin the success of learning if the teachers let it flows without concerning to some solutions to overcome it. First thing that teachers should do is having awareness toward students' problems in learning, whether the problems causing them to have anxiety or not. The next thing is anticipating what anxiety dominating students' mind in order the teachers can have a better teaching plan and giving optimal support. If the anxiety dominates the students is debilitating anxiety, teachers should have more effort to encourage the students changing their view that learning English is not as difficult and scary as they think as long as they have a strong effort to improve their language proficiency. Besides, teachers should apply the effective strategy in teaching to make the students obtain the language input easier. In this case, bottom-up technique can be one of ways to inhibit the negative effect of listening anxiety since it can help the students connecting the meaning of words, phrases and sentences used by the

speakers to get the intended message behind the material heard. In addition, some researchs have proved the benefit of this technique to increase students' listening skill.

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