A PEDAGOGIC EXPLORATION INTO LISTENING COMPREHENSION SKILLS AMONG INTERMEDIATE AND/OR ADVANCED ESL (ENGLISH FOR SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNER): CASE OF A.M.U.

ABSTRACT

THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF

Doctor of Philosophy

IN

LINGUISTICS

BY

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2008
Abstract
ABSTRACT

Listening is the process by which the brain is able to perceive and interpret sounds. Listening is one of the basic linguistic skills. Here, we can say that ability to identify and understand what the speaker is saying, it also involves understanding a speaker's accent or pronunciation, his grammar, vocabulary and also grasping his meaning. In language teaching and learning it should be considered important. It is an important skill but is so common in our everyday life that we generally overlook it. As Bress examines that out of four skills listening, speaking reading and writing, listening is always in use. We start listening as babies and indulge in it even before we start to speak. It renders comprehension and understanding, Bress has pointed out in context of ESL or EFL that the more one feels confident and better to communicate in English.

When listening skill is observed in classroom situation it is appalling to find that teaching of listening is mostly neglected in our language classroom. This neglect is because we take it for granted and do no recognize the importance of listening as we acquire it automatically without taking any particular, training. Hence, for many years listening skills occupied lowest position in language teaching.
Nunan has pointed out learners and teachers of second language feel that listening and reading are secondary skills but gradually it is acquiring high position. In the language classroom it is being considered more important because it provides input for the learner, as Rost (1994) points out, learning cannot simply begin without understanding input at the right level. This makes learning fundamental to speaking.

The present study focuses on making a pedagogic exploration into listening comprehension skills and examine the problems faced by learners in classroom situation at A.M.U. by following two important processes namely top-down and bottom up. It explores.

a) How much listening is being practiced in the classroom?

b) Out of the four skills which one is profound most?

c) What is the status of the listening skill in the classroom?

d) What is the attitude of the teachers towards listening?

e) What is the place of listening in the methodology used in the classroom for teaching listening comprehension.

f) Do the teacher integrate listening with reading skills and speaking skills and is there any possibility of doing so.

The thesis consists of six chapters including the statement of Intent (one).
Chapter two entitled Listening in Language Teaching and Learning. Here, the place of listening skills has been historically traced. Some of the important approaches and methods have been examined that whether listening has been accommodated or not. This chapter also discusses the nature of listening process, types, models and dimensions of listening. We have observed listening in first language and second language and also learner’s difficulties in listening.

Here, relationship between listening and recall, listening and speaking and use of listening in pronunciation teaching have also been discussed.

Listening Comprehension: The State of Art is chapter three which examples the listening process and looks at how language is used to convey meaning. It also lays the foundation for an understanding of the constructing for assessing listening comprehension. Here, understanding of the constructing for assessing listening comprehension have been observed. In the State of Art, work from a different academic disciplines have been discussed.

In chapter four which is entitled ‘The study’ deals with the methodology used, the subjects of the study, types of data, sources of data and the task designs.
This study was conducted on the students both boys and girls in both intensive and extensive listening.

Some female teachers were also included from the faculty of arts and social sciences.

Two types of data were collected one from the classroom situations and second was the interview-based data.

Methodology: This study was both experimental and observational kind. Experimental was on the basis of classroom teaching recordings where tape recorders were used.

The other one was anonymous observation which was based on field diary based on the observations in the classroom and other situations also.

Chapter five discusses interpretation and analyses of data generated through different tasks that were appropriate for different constructs. It also includes exercises which helped in exploring the possibility of integrating listening skill with reading and speaking skills.

Chapter six is the conclusion. In this we examined the problems faced by advanced ESL learners in classroom situation at A.M.U. To analyse this problem two very important processes were considered namely:

1. top-down process
2. bottom-up process

Top-down process worked well as our respondents regularly used their previous knowledge of the context to make sense of what is being said in the class. They have knowledge of and were able to understand the lectures fully well. This was clear when study was made on them. But the bottom-up process did not prove effective, because respondents were well versed in language skills and were already aware of the English structure.

Some other tasks were administered on them which were helpful in testing the listening ability of the respondents were already in practice and the teachers were using them for testing the listening ability of the students. Here dictation task along with multiple choice questions, summarizing task and comprehension test.

Although conversational tasks are in use in those classes where the emphasis is on communicative language teaching, we hardly found this task being administered in the class.

When students were given dictation exercises based on the short passage text which was familiar to them by introducing some innovations we found respondents very motivated.

Testing listening comprehension which was based on partial dictation never existed so it was new to them which created interest in them.
Minimal pair exercises helped the listeners to select the correct word for using sentences which helped them to differentiate between words on the basis of sounds with minor differences. Multiple choice questions helped listeners to retain number of choices when answering or questioning any sentence.

The language was tested with regard to grammatical structures knowledge, the respondents did very well. With regard to comprehension passages they help them in developing both listening comprehension and reading skills.

Results of these studies conducted here with reference to reception listening skill and reflective listening skills clearly point out that there is strong closeness between listening skill and the other two skills namely reading and speaking.

Therefore, one must have a whole language approach and the teaching of language skills must follow certain order.
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CERTIFICATE

Certified that Ms. Farah Bano has completed her Ph.D. thesis entitled A PEDAGOGIC EXPLORATION INTO LISTENING COMPREHENSION SKILLS AMONG INTERMEDIATE AND/OR ADVANCED ESL LEARNER: CASE OF AMU under my supervision. To the best of my knowledge this is her original work, and is suitable for submission for evaluation for the award of Ph. D. degree in Linguistics.

(S. IMTIAZ HASNAIN)
Professor of Sociolinguistics
And
Supervisor
Dedicated
In memory
of my
Father
Prof. Zaheer Uddin Malik
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In the name of “Almighty God” who is merciful and beneficent bestowed upon me showed the right path and provide me the strength.

I feel short of vocabulary in expressing my heartiest feelings and deep sense of gratitude towards my research supervisor Prof. S. Imtiaz Hasnain, Department of Linguistics, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh. He is the most learned supervisor without his guidance and supervision throughout my research work I was not able to move a single step. Therefore, it may well be pointed out that this probe would not have been completed without the unceasing guidance and supervision of my guide. I express my profound gratefulness and obligation to my supervisor, Prof. Hasnain who with great labour, supervised this work to its completion and rendered all possible help to me, which I needed, whatever and whenever.

It gives me immense pleasure to express my deep sense of gratitude and indebtedness to Prof. Fatihi, Chairman, Department of Linguistics, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh for his constant and sincere help and encouragement.
I express my profound obligation and thanks to the Librarian of British Council Library, Delhi for providing me help in connection with the collection of research material.

For giving me strength and support I would like to thank all my friends and teaching staff of Department of Linguistics among them particularly Dr. (Mrs.) Shabana Hameed, Reader, Department of Linguistics for her sincere encouragement and help wherever and whenever needed.

My special thanks to Dr. Nadim Ali, Reader, Department of History, A.M.U., Aligarh for his sincere advices and encouragement.

I am highly thankful to Mr. Goel, office incharge for his constant help. I am also thankful to Mr. Najibul Hasan, seminar incharge, Linguistics Department Seminar, A.M.U., Aligarh for his constant help in connection with books. I owe my acknowledgement to the staff of the Department of Linguistics Dr. Riyaz, Mr. Hasib, Mr. Wasiuddin.

I am greatly obliged to my student Miss. Iram Khan student of B.A. II year and other students of class B.A. I year, II and III year for helping me in data collection. I must acknowledge Mr. Kafeel A. Khan who deserves appreciation for typing my research work very carefully.
Last but not the least, I must take the opportunity of expressing my heartfelt gratitude and thanks to my most loving parents Prof. Zahiruddin Malik and Mrs. Zarina Malik for their direction and love which I had always received from them and to my loving brothers Zia Malik, Saif Malik, Mustajab Malik and bhabhi Ayesha Malik who are always source of encouragement. My special thanks to my loving son Ali Imam who never disturbed me in my work.

I wish to express my profound thanks to Dr. (Mrs.) Shagufta Imtiaz, Reader, Department of English, A.M.U., Aligarh, wife of my supervisor for her affectionate and sincere attitude towards me.

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Chapter One
Statement of Intent
Listening is the ability to identify and understand what others are saying. It involves understanding a speaker’s accent or pronunciation, his grammar and vocabulary, and grasping his meaning. It is an important skill, and in language teaching and learning it should be treated with more concern. As Bress (2006) points out that of all the four skills, listening must surely be the most practiced one. We start listening as babies and awfully indulge in it before we even start to speak. It renders comprehension and understanding. In the context of ESL or EFL Bress has rightly pointed out, the more one understands the more one feels powerful and confident and, thus, one develops the ability to communicate in English.

However, if we look at the classroom situation it is appalling to find that teaching of listening is mostly neglected in our language classroom. The neglect is not because we do not recognize the importance of listening but because we take it for granted that learners automatically acquire this skill without imparting any training. Hence, for many years listening skills occupied lowest position in language teaching. Language teaching for several years placed emphasis on productive skills and the
relationship between receptive and productive skills was poorly understood.

Nunan has quite aptly captured this subordinate status of listening skills. According to him “Listening is the Cinderella skill in second language learning. All too often, it has been overlooked by its older sister – speaking ... being able to claim knowledge of a second language means being able to speak and write in that language.” (Nunan, 2002: 238) Learners and teachers of second language feel that listening and reading are secondary skills – “means to other ends, rather than ends in themselves.” (Nunan, 2002: 238) Despite the setback which has relegated listening to a secondary position, it is gradually acquiring much greater prominence and importance in language teaching. The emphasis on the role of comprehensible input in second language acquisition has provided irrevocable boost to listening. It is now being considered vital in the language classroom because it provides input for the learner, and as Rost (1994) points out, learning cannot simply begin without understanding input at the right level. This makes learning fundamental to speaking. Emergence of ‘listen and repeat’ approach and its persistent use in the teaching of pronunciation further validates the rightful claim of listening in the language classroom.
Aim of the study:

The present study aims of making a pedagogic exploration into listening comprehension skills and examine the problems faced by learners in classroom situation at AMU by following two important processes namely top-down and bottom up. It explores:

i. How much listening is being practiced in the classroom?

ii. Out of the four skills which one is preferred most?

iii. What is the status of the listening skill in the classroom.

iv. What is the attitude of the teachers towards listening?

v. What is the place of listening in the methodology used in the classroom for teaching listening comprehension.

vi. Do the teacher integrate listening with reading skills and speaking skills, and is there any possibility of doing so?

Organization of the study:

The study is divided into six chapters. The first chapter is the statement of intent.

Chapter two discusses the general characteristics of listening by showing how listening is used in every day life without giving it much thought. As a vital mental capacity, it is one of the principal means by which we understand and take part in the world around us. It provides information in all communicative situations. In spite of being an
important skill, listening has not been given adequate place in language teaching and learning, and has been treated as the Cindrella of the four macro-skills. However, as an essential part of communicative competence, it deserves equal treatment with the others in language teaching and learning situation. The place of listening skills has, in this chapter, been historically traced. Here some of the main approaches and methods, that have been used over the past several decades, have been looked at to see whether listening has been accommodated or not. This chapter also discusses the nature of listening process, types, models and dimensions of listening. Listening in first and a second language and the learners’ difficulties in listening. Relationship between listening and recall, listening and speaking, and use of listening in pronunciation teaching have also been discussed in this chapter.

Chapter three examines the listening process and looks at how language is used to convey meaning. It also lays the foundation for an understanding of the constructing for assessing listening comprehension. While discussing the state of art, work from a number of academic disciplines have been reviewed to arrive at a broad overview of the listening comprehension, and to see how comprehension works. It looks at how the listening comprehension is an active process of constructing meaning by applying knowledge, the incoming sound, it also discusses a
wide range of variables, characteristics of the speaker and situation that affect comprehension.

Much of the processes in which language is used to convey meaning relates to reading as well as listening. Since listening shares many characteristics with reading, much of the characteristics of listening comprehension are also characteristics of language comprehension. This chapter also attempt to look at how the notion of listening construct has been developed by language testers. It also explores the three main approaches to assessing listening comprehension and discusses a number of ideas and different techniques associated with those approaches.

Chapter four ‘The Study’ deals with the methodology used, the subjects of the study, types of data, sources of data and the task designs.

Chapter five, provides interpretation and analyses of data generated through different tasks that were appropriate for different constructs.

Chapter six is the conclusion followed by the Bibliography.
Chapter Two

Listening in Language

Teaching and Learning
CHAPTER TWO

LISTENING IN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

2.1 Listening in everyday life:

Listening is so common in our everyday life that we tend to overlook it, although it is a vital mental capacity which enables us to understand and communicate with people around us. In communication it is oracy, i.e. our capacity to use spoken language, remains crucial. The power of oracy can be exploited not only by the way one speaks but also the way we listen. Listening involves both social and cognitive processes – that is, our relationships with people and the way we structure our internal knowledge.

2.2 Listening information in communicative situation:

Language has informational value which it signals in both interactional and non-interactional types of communicative situation. All communicative situations involve some type of information in which the information is conveyed by the active involvement of both the listener and the speaker. This is the rationalist view of signaling information in communicative situation. In this view, communication is seen as a process of preserving a speaker’s message throughout a transmission
process and the role of the listener is to reconstruct the speaker’s message as encoded in the signal. From this perspective, listening is viewed as a sequential process in which the incoming data, initiated in the form of sound signals, is transformed in the listener’s memory as it undergoes various conversions (for storage and retrieval).

This process, according to Clark and Clark (1977), is carried out through various stages: the hearer takes in raw speech, holds an image of the speech in working memory, immediately tries to organize this representation in parts, constructs meaning connections between these parts and continually builds up a hierarchy of these parts. In psycholinguistic terms these stages are described as a bottom-up process. In auditory processing (listening), individual sounds and groups of sounds are the most concrete phonological units, which are combined to understand words; understand phrases and sentences.

2.3 Language teaching approaches and listening:

Initially approaches to language teaching did not recognize the necessity or even relevance of teaching listening in classroom setting. The various protagonists of the teaching methods overlooked the aspect of listening as it was perceived as an unmarked constituent of our everyday life. However, the results arriving from the studies on learning to listen in a second language amply demonstrated that learning to listen
in L2 situation is far more complex and difficult than in first language. Adult learners of second language face immense difficulties in learning to listen. Hence a number of techniques were suggested in subsequent approaches and methods of language teaching in order to develop specific and / or general listening skills. Field points out that changes to the teaching of listening occurred as a result of three main developments. According to him, “first, there has been a shift in perspectives, so that listening as a skill takes priority over details of language content. Secondly, there has been a wish to relate the nature of listening practiced in the classroom to the kind of listening that takes place in real life ... Thirdly, we have become aware of the importance of providing motivation and a focus for listening.” (Field 1998, cited in Flowerdew and Miller, 2005: 20)

2.3.i Grammar-translation approach:

This approach focused exclusively on the analysis of written texts. It viewed language as a descriptive set of finite rules that, once learned, gave access to the language. It focused on a number of components that made of a grammar-translation syllabus, but no where the listening goals were ever emphasized. The only listening that the students were expected to do was to listen to a description of the rules of the second language in the first language.
2.3.ii Direct method approach:

It was not until the late 1800's that listening was used in language instruction as a means of developing and communication. Here the oral sequences were developed for teaching based on how children learned to use language and students were asked to read the sequences in order to understand their meaning. Here the focus of listening practices was principally to present language in context. This approach led to the emergence of the direct method (also known as natural method or conversational method) that came about as a reaction to the grammar – translation approach in which oral presentations and oral comprehension were emphasized. The target language was exclusively used in the classroom and translation was proscribed. Listen and answer questions were the intended learning goals of this approach and it truly focused on teaching listening skills first and other skills later.

2.3.iii Oral approach:

The direct approach was initially designed for small group teaching. It was later adopted for use with larger groups and for teaching all the four skills of language. This approach of teaching, which emerged in England, was called the oral approach because all lessons started with oral presentations. Grammar patterns and vocabulary were introduced through the dialogues. Oral drills, also based on the dialogues, were
devised by the teachers to reinforce new language points initially through a listening mode. Finally learners were given 'reading' and writing assignments using the structures and words they had practiced.

2.3.iv Audio-lingual approach:

The time when oral approach was being developed in Europe, American linguists began to develop the audio-lingual approach, which was generated at the behest of the U.S. Defense Force during and after World War II. In this approach also the emphasis was on oral presentation and oral drills. Richards and Rogers described the audio-lingual approach as “the teaching of listening comprehension, pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary [which] are all related to development of aural fluency.” (2001: 58) The idea behind the use of the technique of dialogue and drills was to refrain learners to think in the new language by helping them to form new habits.

2.3.v Communicative approach:

The audio-lingual approach became a popular teaching method in the 1960s and early 1970’s when language laboratories were in fashion. It helped many pupils learn second languages. Then came a gradual decline in its popularity and world-wide rethinking of the principles involved in second language teaching started surfacing. This resulted in the communicative approach to language teaching, which emphasized not
just the importance of oral language in language acquisition, but the use of realistic and authentic social language. The communicative approach is based on the premise that what we do in the classroom should have some real-life communicative value, and real-life listening is integrated into communicative approach. Here the learning goals are related to listening in which learners were no longer exposed to ideal grammar and vocabulary samples of oral language. Instead they were given exposure to situational dialogues and language functions through listening and interaction.

2.4 Listening skills in language teaching and learning:

Listening is one of the essential key factors for success in daily communication. Morley points out that

Listen is used for more than any other single language skill in normal daily life. On average, we can expect to listen twice as much as we speak, four times more than we read, and five times more than we write. (2001: 70)

As part of a child's language abilities in normal sequence it is the listening that comes first, and then after some time the child begins speaking. Reading and writing come very late when the child goes to school, normally at the age of six.
In language teaching and learning, listening skill should be treated with more concern. Bress (2006) points out that of all the four skills, listening must surely be the most practiced one. We start listening as babies and we do an awful lot of it before we even start speaking. The more they understand the more powerful they feel and the more confidence they have in their ability to communicate a language. Peterson also points out that "through listening, learners can build awareness ... and thus establish a base for more fluent productive skill." (2001:87) Even in speaking activities, listening is included as an essential part without noticing that this is listening. Chastain clearly points out that "to learn to speak, students must first learn to understand the spoken language they hear." (1988: 193) Listening as a skill is the first essential step for speaking. Harmer (2001 :228) points out that:

Listening ... is important since it provides the perfect opportunity to hear voices other than the teacher's, enables students to acquire good speaking habits as a result of the spoken English they absorb, and helps to improve their own pronunciation.

In a metaphorical sense listening can be described as breathing in (listening) and breathing out (speaking). No one can breathe out before breathing in. Moreover, listening can be integrated in other parts of
language teaching such as vocabulary and grammar. Morley explains this point as:

> Listening comprehension lessons are a vehicle for teaching elements of grammatical structures and allow new vocabulary items to be contextualized. (2001: 70)

Listening as a skill is neglected in the curriculum of many schools and universities. Teachers and students are concerned about the ultimate goal (i.e. speaking). They do not pay enough attention to listening comprehension, which is the "easiest" way to develop speaking. Teachers and students are looking only for the outcomes. Also, listening cannot be examined, corrected, and observed, so teachers and students tend to neglect it.

Listening was initially viewed as a passive skill, but recently it is considered as an active process in language teaching and learning. The view that listening is an active process gradually developed. As Morley put it:

> In the 1969, the International Association of Applied Linguistics: Cambridge- England stated that Listening comprehension is being recognized as a fundamental skill, "Listening and reading as non-passive." In the 1970s, the status of listening began to change from
neglected one to one of increasing importance. In the 1980s, special attention to listening was incorporated into new instructional frameworks. In the 1990s, attention to listening increased dramatically, and aural comprehension in second language/foreign language acquisition became an important area of study.

However, in many countries, at least practically, listening is still treated as passive or as the least important skill. This happens because of many factors, such as the shortage of audio-visual aids, and over crowded classrooms in which listening seemed difficult to be carried out.

2.5 Place of listening skills in language learning:

The role and importance of listening skills in language learning has always been undermined by many applied linguists. Not only that they have ignored the nature of listening in a second language, but have also often believed that listening skills could be acquired through exposure and, therefore, teaching it was not really required. Of late there has been shift in stance and now the scholars of applied linguistics have started showing an active interest in the role of listening comprehension in second language acquisition. Richards and Renandya (2002) have observed that:
... by the development of powerful theories of the nature of language comprehension, and by the inclusion of carefully developed listening courses in many ESL programs ... some applied linguists [have gone] so far as to argue that listening comprehension is at the core of second language acquisition and therefore demands a much greater prominence in language teaching. (2002: 235)

If one traces the position of listening in the history of language learning one finds that listening has, every so often, come into fashion. It got a boost in the 1960s when oral language skills were emphasized. Again it became popular in the 1980s when Krashen’s (1982) ideas about comprehensible input gained prominence. Later, it was reinforced by Asher’s Total Physical Response (TPR). TPR theory was developed by James Asher, a professor of Psychology at San Jose State University, California. It emphasizes on developing comprehension skills before the learner is taught to speak. It shares the belief with several different comprehension based language teaching proposals that:

(i) comprehension abilities precede productive skills in learning a language,
(ii) the teaching of speaking should be delayed until comprehension skills are established, and

(iii) skills acquired through listening transfer to others skills.

Work in the field of first language also encouraged the proponents of listening in a second language. Brown (1990), for instance, underlined the importance of developing oracy (i.e. the ability to listen and speak) as well as literacy in school. This shift in emphasis was important. Prior to this the first language learners were only required to be taught reading and writing skills. Teaching how to listen and speak was never on the agenda because, as Nunan points out, “these skills were automatically bequeathed to them as native speakers.” (2002: 238)

2.6 Nature of listening process:

Listening is an active process which can be depicted in the following manner:

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Input → Processing → Output
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Here input entails the words spoken by the speaker and output is the response of the listener. The listener processes the input and after the processing gives the output. There are two ways in which the input is processed:

(a) bottom-up processing

(b) top-down processing
In bottom-up processing, the listener depends mainly on the incoming input for the meaning of the message. It assumes that listening is a process of decoding the sounds that one hears in a linear fashion, starting from the smallest meaningful units to complete texts. The linearity assumes that, phonemic units are decoded and linked together to form words, words are linked up to develop phrases, phrases into utterances and utterances are linked to form complete, meaningful texts. According to this view, meaning itself is derived as the last step. Anderson and Lynch (1988) describe it as, ‘listener as tape recorded view’ because messages are taken and stored sequentially by the listener in much the same way as the tape recorder.

The top down interpretation view assumes an active involvement of the learner. It suggests that the learner actively constructs the original meaning of the speaker by using incoming sounds as clues. Here the listener uses his previous knowledge of the context where he can make his own sense of listening. Context includes knowledge of the topic at hand, the speaker or speakers and their relationship to the situation, and the knowledge of the prior events. Hence, in top-down processing input is not the only source of meaning. Background knowledge also provide a clue for understanding the message.
2.7 Types of listening:

Depending upon the number of variables, listening has been classified into different types. These variables may include purpose of listening, the role of the listener, and the type of text being listened to. In listening, purpose may entail different objectives, for instance listener listens to news broadcast for some specific information, like sport event; or he may listen to a sequence of instructions for operating computer software; or he may listen to a poem or short story, etc. The listening purpose can be achieved by holding the listening text constant and getting learners to listen to the text several times by following different instructions each time. The important listening tasks is to teach learners different forms of listening and repeating it several times matching with each other.

Another kind of listening is where a listener has to take part in the interaction is known as reciprocal listening. In a monologic situation when listener listens to a single person’s speech, which mostly happens in classroom and other situations, and has no chance of correcting it by clarifying that he is comprehending correctly, this listening is called nonreciprocal listening. In the role of a non-reciprocal listener, he is often referred to as ‘eves dropper’.
Adrian Doff (1988) talks about two types of listening, namely casual listening and focused listening. In the former listening occurs without much concentration whereby we listen to someone or something without any particular purpose. The latter is more of an intense kind in which the listener is attentive and concentrates on what is being said by the speaker. It is also referred to as ‘intensive listening.’

2.8 Models of listening:

Humans have an innate ability to hear. However, only hearing is not listening. There are other factors also involved in the development of effective listening skills. As first language learners benefited from training in how to listen, so is the case with second language learners. Several models have been developed to explain how listening process functions and how we develop listening skills. These models are bottom-up, top-down, and interactive which are at the core of learning listening skills.

2.8.i Bottom-up model:

The bottom-up is the first model of listening which was developed in the 1940s and 1950s. According to this model, listeners build understanding by starting with the smallest units of the acoustic message (phonemes). These smaller units are combined to form words which in turn together combine to form phrases, clauses and sentences. The
individual sentences further combine to form ideas and concepts and relationship between them. These units are arranged in a hierarchical fashion in which each unit exists independent to each other. Here listening can take place without any reference to sound combinations word combination, sentence combination, etc.

This model of listening process follows what is traditionally known as a transmission view of communication. According to this model the sender encodes, a message and sends it through a channel which the decoder decodes. In this transmission successful communication is guaranteed, provided there is no deficiency in the channel and both the sender and the receiver are using the same code. In this model also communication can take place without any reference to the speaker, hearer or wider context.

2.8.ii Top-down model:

Rather than relying upon the individual sounds and words, the top-down model depended on the previous knowledge for processing a text. The previous knowledge may be both the background knowledge as well the prior contextual knowledge, which provide pre-established patterns or what Tannen (1979) refers to as “structures of expectations.” The background knowledge has been referred to in terms of ‘schema’, ‘frame’, ‘script’ and ‘scenario’. Here ‘schema’ is often used as a cover
term to indicate “an active organization of past experiences.” (Bartlett, 1932: 201)

In the top-down model listening is purpose-driven and listeners attend to what they need. Here only those expectations are activated by the learners which they consider to be relevant for the text being processed.

2.8.iii Interactive model:

As the name suggests, the interactive model synthesizes both the top-down and bottom-up models of listening process. It was developed by Rumelhart (1975) within the context of reading and is equally applied to listening. It is a parallel processing where the phonological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic information interact simultaneously.

2.9 Dimensions of listening:

Flowerdew and Miller (2005) have proposed a model of second language listening comprehension, which consists of a set of dimensions of listening. These dimensions are as follows:

(a) Individualized dimension
(b) Cross-cultural dimension
(c) Social dimension
(d) Contextualized dimension
(e) Affective dimension
(f) Strategic dimension

(g) Inter-textual dimension, and

(h) Critical dimension

The following figure represents these dimensions:

![Figure 1: A model of second language listening comprehension](Image)

(Flowerdew and Miller, 2005)

Flowerdew and Miller (2005) believe that although bottom-up, top-down and interactive models have been in extensive use to account for the listening process, they have not been able to “cater to the complexities of the listening process, a process that also encompasses individual,
cultural, social, contextualized, affective, strategic, inter-textual, and critical dimensions.” (Flowerdew and Miller, 2005: 97)

2.10 Listening and Recall:

It is commonly assumed that listening is connected with or closely tied to our memory. Recall is the retrieval of information stored in the memory. Our memory works in two ways:

(i) It identifies the physical and chemical changes that take place in our brain when we store or retrieve information,

(ii) It identifies the brain functions and interaction, which enable us to store and retrieve information.

The second aspect of memory’s working is also referred to as the ‘functional view of memory processes’, and it is widely used in language pedagogy and research.

Listening and recall is an ongoing act which constantly goes on because of the dynamic nature of memory. In fact, memory is not simply a fixed storage capacity in the brain; rather it is a dynamic process. As Ulric Neisser points out, “memory is not a receptacle of stimuli that we simply store and retrieve; it is rather an active, constructive process.” (Neisser, 1982 cited in Rost, 1994: 66)

One of the recall tasks is called summarizing. It is a complex task because it is not just governed by our recall ability, but also influenced by
a number of factors that may affect our recall. Brown et al. (1985) have outlined a number of processes between listening and summarizing, which must be observed in recall task in a classroom situation. These processes are:

(a) Interpretation of the language (even non-verbal images) and constructing a representation of those items in memory.

(b) Constructing an interpretation of the instruction provided in the class. This refers to ‘writing a summary’.

(c) Understanding how to relate what is required by the task to the language input. It basically involves taking decision regarding how much information to include and how to present that information. This refers to the aspect of ‘giving a summary’.

(d) This is an aspect of ‘producing the summary’.

The factors that may affect listening and recall are lack of attention and interest; information overload when there is too much new and old information in discourse, which do not get proper representation; inability to organize information; tendency to distort facts, etc.

There are some types of listening situations that ‘place greater emphasis on recall. These situations can be lectures, some kinds of listening tasks such as understanding short bursts of conversation etc. We engage our memories for recalling relevant knowledge in order to make
sense of the listening situation. In such recall there is always an approximation, as reconstructing complete texts is impossible.

2.11 Listening in pronunciation teaching:

There have been two arguments against the explicit teaching of pronunciation. The first argument relies on two basic assumptions about the acquisition of second language phonology: the first, based on the critical period hypothesis, claims that it is virtually impossible for adults to acquire native like pronunciation in a foreign language, and the second, arising primarily from the work of Krashen (1982), insists that pronunciation is an acquired skill and that focused instruction is at best useless and at worst detrimental. This argument has been surrounded by a number of studies, which have been both supportive as well as dismissive of the argument.

The second argument against pronunciation teaching claims that the factors affecting second language pronunciation are chiefly acquisition variables, which cannot be affected by focused practice and the teaching of formal rules (Krashen, 1982). The enormous influence of this argument is evidenced by the virtual disappearance of pronunciation work in ‘communicative’ course books of the 1970s.

Earlier teaching of pronunciation were based on methods which involved imitating drills and reading aloud. But after the development of
recording technology and with the rise of Audio linguaiism, such methods became stock-in-trade in language classroom teaching situation. Although grammar and vocabulary teaching lost its charm in the teaching of pronunciation, the listen and repeat approach persisted. Some scholars pointed out the importance of imitation drills which depends on learners aptitude for oral mimicry. If learners are not good listeners drills may cause production to stabilize before teaching the target.

Though it was agreed upon that the listen and repeat had its relevance in the teaching of pronunciation, what was required to explore was the question – which half of the listen and repeat equation resulted in increased accuracy – perception or production? Some teaching materials emphasize the importance of sound discrimination, insisting that students who cannot hear a particular English contrast have no chance of reproducing it. However, several studies suggest that this is not true. For instance, Goto’s (1971) study on Japanese learner’s ability to produce and perceive r/l contrast points out that some subjects with poor discrimination could still pronounce the sounds correctly. From this study one may conclude that perception may not precede production and that awareness of kinesthetic sensation is as important as auditory feedback (Goto’s study cited in Jones, 2002). Based on this and similar other studies one may convincingly conclude that listening and repeating
involved in pronunciation have dialectic relationship in which both stand to gain from each other. As Pennington (1996) points out, “focused listening can improve oral production and practice in oral production can improve auditory perception.” (cited in Jones, 2002: 180)

Listening thus plays an important role in pronunciation training and pronunciation teaching must be carried out in concert with other skills, including listening.

2.12 Listening and speaking abilities:

The language learners study English to command speaking skill. To speak second language various situations are involved which have different purposes like casual conversation, to make social contact with people, to give instructions, or to describe things, etc. Each of these different purposes for speaking implies knowledge, how spoken language reflects the context or situation in which speech occurs, the participants involved and their specific roles and relationships, and the kind of activity the speakers are involved in. In the last 20 years or so years, linguists have provided a great deal of information on how speakers use language appropriately in different situations and clarified the complex nature of what is involved in developing spoken fluency in a second or foreign language. The central role of listening comprehension in second language acquisition or in foreign languages acquisition process is now accepted
and a lay body of research has undoubtedly shown that listening play an important role in the development of speaking abilities. Listening, in fact, precedes speaking; speaking feeds on listening. During every interaction speaker plays a double role – at one end he is a listener and at the other end he is speaker. Thus duality of role has rightly been described by Mendelsohn and Rubin (1995). According to them,

> While listening, learners must comprehend the text by retaining information in memory, integrate it with what follows, and continually adjust their understanding of what they hear in the light of prior knowledge and of incoming information. (Mendelsohn and Rubin, 1995: 35)

One cannot respond if one does not understand. Hence, speaking and listening are closely interwoven or related to each other and this is the basic mechanism through which the rules of language are internalized.

### 2.13 Listening in first language:

Children learn their first language among the people they grow and listening is the first stage of learning a language. The first language development is related to a child’s cognitive development. Children learn new language when they come across new objects and new situations.
Here they bring their scheme of mental operations and develops language. This process is called assimilation which is most important in acquisition.

In the child’s early language development, the aural or listening aspect precedes the oral, or speaking aspects. Among children the development of language comprehension proceeds in two directions - one in which there is a comprehension of whole situation that includes learning to understand the meaning of the situations and the functioning of language, and the second direction in which there is a comprehension of individual sounds followed by words and phrases. Key principle in the child’s early language development is concreteness in which the development of listening ability proceeds from concrete situations and events to abstract ones.

Generalization is one of the features of children’s early language comprehension in which they over generalize the words they hear. Generalization means that the child learns words as indexes representing a whole range of objects, situations and events. For instance, meaw may represent all animals and not just ‘cat’. This is an aspect of over generalization.

The relationship between children’s cognitive and linguistic development has been studied by Piaget who noted distinct stages in the
development of child’s ability to perform thinking processes related to concreteness, egocentrism and reasoning. He further noted that the development of each cognitive area depends on repeated, guided social interactions in which the child is challenged to move on to the next stage of development. The development of non-egocentric thinking depends on repeated social interactions in which the child is compelled again and again to take account of other people’s feelings and viewpoints, the capacity to reason and to understand language.

Children, accordingly to child educationists, have the mental capacity to acquire a language efficiently. They develop their listening ability only after they match in new language with information they know about the world around them. To know the communicative value of language, the child needs to know who is speaking to whom, where the speakers are, what they are doing, what are the relevant objects and how do the linguistic input relate to the speaker’s and listeners reactions to each other and the things around them. All these lead to the development of understanding of the significance of language.

The children have the mental capacity to acquire language regardless of social circumstances. However, for interactive language development, more than mental capacity, it is the child’s social framework that is crucial. He acquires pragmatic principles for
participating in and interpreting the events around them, and based on the cultural transmission, which he learns as he grows, he responds appropriately in social rituals.

2.14 Listening in a second language:

Learning to listen in a second language is more difficult than in first language. While learning to listen in the first language requires considerable cognitive development and regular attention to social and linguistic input over a period of time, it is not so in second language. Learning to listen in second language does not require much time to monitor social and linguistic input. On the contrary it is confounded by a number of difficulties ranging from social psychology to neurological. At the socio-psychological level the difficulty is on account of motive. While the principal motive to learn in first language is self-expression, i.e. expressing and comprehending new ideas and relationships, in second language acquisition this motive is missing. In fact, L2 acquisition always takes place at a more advanced level of cognitive and social development, and, therefore, its link with cognitive and social motives is not very strong.

Transfer is yet another psychological problem associated in listening in second language. Transfer is the process whereby knowledge from one concept is used to learn another concept. This process is quite
simple is case of first language, however, in second language learning the process becomes complex, because whatever has been previously learnt is also filtered in the second language system. Complexity gets much more stark in listening, particularly when some fuzzy or unfamiliar concepts are to be transferred in the second language system. In such cases the second language learner tends to use translation as a transfer strategy, which, though helps to understand the concept temporarily, weakens the acquisition of the L2 concept.

Not only the psychological transfer, but even the social transfer make L2 listening difficult. There are social situations which differ from culture to culture and society to society. Hence learning to listen in any situation in which the second language is used demands that learners must make judgements about which aspects of native culture can be transferred to the L2 situation.

Yet another factor is neurological. Neurologists and biologists have convincingly demonstrated that after the age of twelve or so certain processes are completed in the brain: development. This makes processing new linguistic sounds difficult. According to Eric Lenneberg (1967), a developmental psychologist, critical period of language acquisition stops around puberty when specific neuro-psychological connections in the brain are complete. The adult learners of listening are,
therefore, bound to face learning difficulties. To overcome such difficulties a number of techniques have been suggested and various improvisation have been proposed by scholars. For instance, in the grammar-translation method, which focused on the analysis of written texts, listening was used solely to accompany these texts and to provide models for oral reading. But later listening was used in language instruction as a means of developing oral communication. Also in the development of direct method both oral presentations and aural comprehensions were emphasized. Even in the oral approach, oral drills, based on the dialogues, were devised to reinforce new language points through the use of listening mode.

2.15 Learners' difficulties in listening:

Ur (1991: 111) presents some difficulties that may be faced by a language learner while listening to English spoken by others. They are as follows:

1. I have trouble catching the actual sounds of the foreign language.
2. I have to understand every word; if I miss something, I feel I am failing and get worried and stressed.
3. I can understand people if they talk slowly and clearly; I can't understand fast, natural native sounding speech.
4. I need to hear things more than once in order to understand.
5. I find it difficult to "keep up" with all the information I am getting, and cannot think ahead or predict.

6. If the listening goes on for a long time I get tired, and find it more and more difficult to concentrate.

In fact, there are some characteristics of spoken language that make the listening process difficult. Brown (2001: 252) summarizes these characteristics as follows:

1. **Clustering:**

   In spoken language, we break down speech into smaller groups of words. This causes some difficulties for students to identify these "clusters". Indeed, they will try to retain long constituents (the whole sentence or several sentences).

2. **Redundancy:**

   In conversation, there are repetitions, rephrasing, elaborations, and insertions of phrases such as "I mean", "You know", etc. This may confuse the students because students want to know every phrase.

3. **Reduced Forms:**

   Many reduced forms are used in spoken language. These reduced forms can cause significant difficulties to the learners who have been exposed to the full forms of the English language.

   In spoken language, hesitations, false starts, pauses, and
corrections are common. This can cause some kind of difficulties to the learners to comprehend the language.

5. Colloquial Language:

Learners usually have been exposed to Standard English. Sometimes, they find it difficult to deal with spoken language that is mixed with colloquial language (idioms, slang ... etc.).

6. Rate of Delivery:

English language learners usually think that native speakers speak too fast. It seems impossible for some learners to comprehend such speakers.

7. Stress, Rhythm and Intonation:

These features are very important for comprehension. English language learners find it difficult to comprehend such spoken language.

8. Interaction:

To learn to listen is also to learn to respond and to continue a chain of listening and responding. Students should be taught to listen and speak. This also can cause some difficulties.
Chapter Three
Listening Comprehension: The State of Art
3.1 Introduction:

Listening comprehension is a very complex process that involves a number of different types of knowledge – linguistic and non-linguistic. The linguistic knowledge entails phonology, lexis, syntax, semantics and discourse structure, while the non-linguistic knowledge is about the topic, the context and general knowledge of the world. Hence measuring listening comprehension is a difficult task. It requires a careful construction of test and proper understanding of what is to be measured is the starting point for test construction. The thing that we attempt to measure is called a construct. The test will be useful and valid only if it measures the right construct. Therefore, the first task of the test developer is to understand the construct, and secondly to make a test that in a way measures that construct. This is construct validity, and the right construct is the central issue in all assessment.

3.2 Two views for assessing knowledge:

Inasmuch as the language comprehension system involves a number of different types of knowledge, it is important to examine how the different types of knowledge is applied during comprehension.
Existing literature in listening comprehension points out that there are clearly two important views regarding how knowledge is applied to the incoming sound. These are the bottom-up view and the top-down view.

It is often assumed that language processing takes place in a definite order, beginning with the lowest level of detail and moving up to the highest level. In this exercise the acoustic input is first decoded into phonemes or smallest sound segments, and then it is used to identify individual words. After that the processing proceeds to the syntactic level, followed by an analysis of the semantic content to arrive at a literal understanding of the basic linguistic meaning. The listener interprets the literal meaning in terms of the communicative situation to understand what the speaker means. This is the bottom-up view,

which sees language comprehension as a process of passing through a number of consecutive stages, or levels and the output of each stage becomes the input for the next higher stage. (Buck, 2001: 2)

However, both research and daily experience indicate that the processing of the different types of processing of the different types of knowledge does not occur in a fixed sequence, but different types of processing may occur at the same time, in a simple order. Thus, syntactic knowledge can be used to help identify a word. The meaning of a word
can be understood before coding, because there are many different types of knowledge including knowledge of the world. Here it is not necessary to utilize all the information available to us – we can just take in enough to confirm or reject our hypotheses. Buck gives the following example of an incomplete sentence, “she was so angry, she picked up a gun, aimed and _________”, to suggest that the blank space can easily be filled up without evoking much acoustic input. In fact very little acoustic information is required to understand the final word, because our previous knowledge about guns and what angry people do with them will help us determine what word will fill the gap. This is a top-down process. In the top-down process of listening comprehension, the various types of knowledge involved in understanding language are not applied in any fixed order. In fact “they can be used in any order, or even simultaneously and they are all capable of interacting and influencing each other.” (Buck, 2001: 3) The listening comprehension is the result of an interaction between a number of information sources, including the acoustic input, different types of linguistic knowledge, details of the context and general world knowledge. The listeners may use whatever information is available to them, or whatever information seems relevant to interpret what the speaker is saying in the form of sound, the way it takes place in real time, and the linguistic characteristics that make
speech different from written language. As a result of this interaction, reading theorists refer to top-down process as interactive process because listening comprehension is an interaction between a number of information sources be it acoustic, linguistic knowledge, world knowledge, knowledge of the context, etc.

3.3 Knowledge and listening comprehension enterprise:

Listener has an indispensable, sine quo non position in the listening comprehension enterprise. He uses whatever information is available to him on the basis of different types of knowledge, or whatever information seems significant and useful in understanding the meaning of what is said by the speaker. In the listening comprehension enterprise each type of knowledge is applied by the listener for understanding the spoken language in a non-fixed order.

3.3.i Input to the listener:

Speech is an important input to listening where the listeners listen to spoken language. Since listening implies auditory comprehension, which has speech as its base, it is important that every aspect of speech is carefully worked out in the listening comprehension construct. The construct must clearly spell out how speech is encoded in the form of sound, the way it takes place in real time, and the linguistic characteristics that make speech different from written language.
3.3.i.a Acoustic signal in speech:

Acoustic signal is the external input into the listening comprehension process representing phonemes or the meaningful sounds of the language, and the combination of these phonemes which make individual words, phrases, etc. Very often the acoustic signal in normal speech is indistinct, hence the speaker either modifies the sounds considerably or uses certain prosodic features to make the listening comprehension clear and unambiguously encoded in the message. The phonological modifications are made on the basis of certain regular and rule governed processes, which vary from language to language. For instance, in normal-speed speech, some sounds are modified by the sounds next to them; some are simply dropped; others are combined in complex ways. Unlike segmental speech sounds which make many words quite indistinct and ambiguous, the prosodic features, in general, do not make words indistinct. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that the prosodic features of the language, the stress and the intonation, have not made the individual sounds either indistinct or missing, at least in English. By and large speakers stress what they think is important, and the most important words which express the core meaning get additional stress (Brown 1990). In fact, one of the most important aspects of listening comprehension is paying attention to stress and intonation.
Besides prosodic features and phonological modification of speech sounds, shared knowledge and redundancy also provide external input into the listening comprehension process.

3.3.i.b Speech in real-time:

The spoken test is heard only once, and then it is gone. It can be heard again only through intervention of modern recording technology. Even if the speaker repeats what he said, he does not give the same word; he only makes a restatement in a different way, by rephrasing or by providing examples. In case the word is repeated, the intonation may be different. Thus speech takes place in real time. There are two consequences of the real-time speech. First, the listener must process the text at a speed determined by the speaker. This is very fast, which is around three words a second. This leaves little time to think about the precise meaning of each word, or the way the grammatical categories are structured, etc. In order to understand speakers at this speed the listening process must be almost entirely automatic. Buck makes a distinction between two types of cognitive process namely, a controlled process, which involves a sequence of cognitive activities under active control, and automatic processes, which are a sequence of cognitive activities that occur automatically without active control or conscious attention. The difference between controlled and automatic processing is very important.
in second-language use. In the automatic processing the first thing the second language learner does when he comes across some new elements of a language is that he pays conscious attention and reflect upon the new elements. This takes time and use of it gets very slow. As and when the new element becomes more familiar, the processing of that element gets faster, and consequently makes the processing completely automatic.

3.3.i.c Linguistic differences between speech and writing:

The way listeners listen to spoken language is different from written language. The language of speech is not the same as the language of writing. The fact is that both are variants of the same linguistic system and there are some considerable differences between them. People do not usually speak in sentences, but informally in short phrases or clauses, called idea units, put together in a rather loose way. The vocabulary and the grammar also tend to be more colloquial and much less formal.

Spoken idea units usually contain as much information as one can easily remember, usually about two seconds, or about seven words. In English, each idea unit usually has a single, coherent information contour, ending in a clause-final information, preceded and followed by some kind of pause or hesitation. Some idea units do not have a verb. The idea units are a characteristic of spoken language but they can be recognized in written texts. The idea units can be used as a basis for examining the
Chapter 3: Listening Comprehension: The State of Art

major linguistic differences between spoken and written language. In spoken language idea units are shorter with simpler syntax, whereas in written language idea units are more dense with complex syntax. In spoken language idea units are put together by coordinating conjunctions (and, but) whereas in written language idea units are joined in more complex ways. Spoken language tends to be far more personal, emotional, and, therefore, generally overstated and exaggerated. These differences between speech and writing are very important and are crucial for understanding listening comprehension.

3.3.ii Interaction in the listening situation:

Along with the automatic processing and understanding the linguistic characteristics that make spoken language different from written language there is also a degree of interaction between the listener and the speaker. Both listener and speaker form a continuum in listening situation in which the listener’s role may be non-collaborative, i.e. requiring nothing more than interpreting the speaker’s utterance, or collaborative, i.e. making appropriate requests for clarification, back-channelling, etc. In listening situation there is also a possibility of one-way participation, for instance, listening to the radio, television or lecture in such classrooms where presentations are mainly one way. There would also be a listening situation where a group of people talk together with
one person doing most of the talking. But in a truly interactive listening situation there is a conversation between two people, who collaborate equally to maintain the conversation, taking turns to speak with equal rights to participate.

The degree of interaction is related to the extent that the listener must collaborate with the speaker to maintain the conversation. In a typical two-way conversation, the listener and speaker change roles, and they collaborate together to manage the conversation. In such conversations, decisions about who talks, and when, are not random; they are governed by a set of rules. These rules depend on the relationship between the speaker and the listener. Some conversations follow prescribed formulas, such as ordering a meal in a restaurant, others have particular purposes which determine roles of speaker and listener. Speakers generally use intonation and other markers to indicate when they want to pass on the turn, and listeners often indicate by verbal and non-verbal means when they would like to take a turn. And as topics change in conversation, the contributors will dominate conversation.

3.3.ii.a Listener’s responsibility in listening situation:

The listener also has responsibilities to respond in predetermined ways. Expressions like “thank you” with “you’re welcome” and other non verbal gestures indicate that listeners are responding to the listening
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situation. Another cue that indicates listeners response is the use of back channel. If the listener fails to respond in the appropriate way, the interaction may not go well. It is the responsibility of the listeners to provide these responses in a listening situation to indicate that they are understanding what is being said.

3.3.ii.b Function of the interaction in listening situation:

Listening situation also marks the function of the interaction in which two types of language use can be made: transactional language, where the primary purpose is to communicate information, and interactional language, where the primary purpose is social interaction. In the transactional language the objective is to get something done, i.e. the message should be understood by the listener. The examples may be taken from the homework given by a teacher, a complaint made by a customer, or a doctor’s instructions to a patient. The objective of the interactional language, on the other hand, is to maintain social relationships. Here the content of what is said is not important. What is important is the fact that something is said, for instance, talk about the weather, discussion regarding world affairs, and some other aspects of phatic conversation. Generally in most listening situations both transactional and interactional language use can be found. However, there are certain listening situations that make demand on the listener who may
not have listening skills. For example, in case of requests for clarification, back channeling, etc., listening skills are not required.

3.3.iii Knowledge of the language and listening performance:

There are two types of knowledge that are required in language processing, namely declarative knowledge and procedural language. Former is the knowledge of facts or about things, while the latter is knowledge about how to do things. For example, the fact that English has relative classes is declarative knowledge, but the way they are brought together and combined to make sentences is part of the procedural knowledge. Of the two, it is the procedural knowledge which is important for listening performance. The knowledge of language can be seen as our ability to understand words, sentences and discourse.

3.3.iii.a Understanding words:

The process of understanding words can be divided into two parts: to recognize the word and to understand its meaning. The process of understanding words is accessing the mental lexicon where according to most scholars the words are stored, both in their forms and in their meanings. Unlike writing in which gaps are used to indicate words, speech poses tremendous problems in determining exactly what the word is. Here a variety of acoustic clues and other knowledge are used to
explain and understand words. At times even knowledge of the context also proves helpful in understanding words.

3.3.iii.b Understanding sentences:

Usually the words are not recognized in isolation but as part of idea units, that means taking the meaning of individual words, and combining these together to construct the meaning of complete utterances. What is required is to establish the relationship between the meaning of individual words and meaning of the utterances, the process referred to as parsing. Parsing idea units means determining the relationship between the parts of the utterance, i.e., who does what, to whom, and with what. This is based on both semantic and syntactic clues. Some structures are generally more difficult to process than others. For instance, in English negative statements take more time to process than implausible events. In the case of second language listeners, syntactic skill tends to be low and plausibility is likely to play a greater role in language comprehension. Ideas units are hardest to process when both are semantics and syntax are challenging.

3.3.iii.c Understanding discourse:

The rules and conventions of language use cover much larger linguistic units than short chunks of language. In typical conversations, speakers seldom organize complex thoughts into single utterances;
instead information may be spread out over many idea units and many conversational exchanges. Processing connected discourse involves understanding of cohesion and other devices like foregrounding, backgrounding, etc.

3.3.iv Context of communication:

Context is important in listening comprehension for it is in a context that all language use takes place. Context can be of different types. Psycholinguists have traditionally considered context in terms of co-text, or the other parts of the text accompanying that part being processed. The sociolinguists have tended to consider context in terms of context of situation, or the social situation in which the communication takes place. Most language is accompanied by non-verbal information, especially visual information, and this provides a context which has a considerable influence on interpretation. It is also important to think in terms of the cognitive environment in which the language is processed. It is, therefore, the context which includes all other kinds of information and it has the strongest influence on comprehension.

3.3.v Knowledge of the world and listening comprehension:

There are many reasons why the listening process may go wrong. This may be due to background noise, or listener’s failure to concentrate. Second-language listeners have other difficulties too like unknown
vocabulary, complex syntax, or the text could be very fast. In all these cases when listeners try to recall the content of the text, the representation about the text will be incomplete, the interpretation will be inadequate, and will obviously vary. Interpretations also vary even when the listening does not go wrong. Different listeners often understand different things from the same text due to the effects of different background knowledge or schemata. If the topic of the text accords well with the listener's world knowledge or his background knowledge, then it will be much easier to understand than a text with a topic that listener knows nothing about. So, a talk on a subject about which the listener knows nothing will cause considerable confusion even though the language may not be linguistically challenging. Different listeners often have different motives for listening, due to different interests and different needs. Listeners will pay more attention to those features of a text which are more interesting and relevant to him, and what they derive from the text will depend on the listening as well as their background knowledge, and therefore interpretation will differ from listener to listener. Competent listeners will usually grasp all the same information from explicit statements, and they will usually share much common gist after hearing a piece of spoken discourse.
Knowledge of the world can, therefore, influence listening comprehension in several ways, but the two are particularly important, namely knowledge of the overall context and knowledge of specific facts or how things usually happen. While the former restricts interpretations of the text, the latter is used to fill in details that are not explicitly stated in the text.

Inasmuch as using world knowledge is essential in the text comprehension process, what remains to be seen is the way this world knowledge is applied. According to Buck (2001) it is applied through the process of inferencing and there is a wide variety of different types of inferences. Hildyard and Olson (1978) classify the following types of inferences:

(a) propositional inferences, which logically and necessarily follow from any given statement,

(b) enabling inferences, which relate to the causal relationships between events or concepts, and

(c) pragmatic inferences, which provide extra information required in the interpretation of the text.

3.4 **Reading and listening comprehension:**

While many of the characteristics of listening comprehension are also found in all other forms of language comprehension, there is certain
uniqueness about listening ability. This uniqueness can be found with respect to reading in which the language comprehension can be assessed through reading. In such cases it is better to stress on knowledge, skills and abilities, special to real-world listening. Since listening shares many characteristics with reading; it is important that the complexities and characteristics of spoken text be understood and explained in language learning situations before embarking upon the assessment of listening comprehension. If good listening tests have to be created then the teachers should be encouraged not only to teach learners to comprehend realistic spoken language in a realistic way, but also understand the characteristics of spoken texts. Therefore, we must look at phonology, accents, prosodic features, etc. characterizing the spoken texts.

3.4.1 Phonological modification:

Most of the comprehension problems occur not because of sounds but the way the sounds vary in normal speech. In rapid speech, the adjacent sounds influence each other. These modifications are governed by set of rules and these rules vary from language to language. In English, for example, the most important changes occur due to assimilation or elision or intrusion etc. There is also a possibility of variation in pronunciations, caused on account of strong forms or weak forms. The complex set of rules causing phonological modification must
be learned. Absence of such knowledge is likely to reduce comprehension.

3.4.ii Accent:

Accent is another major difficulty which the listeners will face when listening to speakers with unfamiliar accents. Every one has an accent. The factor of accent is related to geography. For instance, Australian English is different from American English or British English. This is the case with most languages. Accents not only vary according to geographical region, but also according to social groups. Native speakers can understand with some difficulty a new accent for the first time, though they are generally used to hearing a wide range of accent. But the second language listeners have real problems when they hear a new accent for the first time. The second language learners take much longer to adjust to a new accent than native speakers.

3.4.iii Prosodic features:

One cannot claim the understanding of sound system only on the basis of the knowledge of pronunciation of individual sounds. One must also know how they change in rapid speech. Stress, intonation are very important language for example in English, stress syllables are not only louder, but also clearly enunciated, longer and often preceded or followed by a short pause. It has stress at word level and at sentence level.
Intonation features also vary from language to language. Both these prosodic features are important in word recognition and comprehension. As Lynch (1998) points out, “the prosodic features have a direct impact on how listeners chunk and interpret discourse segments.” (cited in Buck, 2001: 38) One particular aspect that affects the comprehension is the speech rate. In fact, the relationship between speech rate and comprehension is very important. There is a gradual decline in comprehension if the speed of recordings from talking book is beyond 275 words per minute. It suggests that speech rate is more critical to comprehension when listening to speakers with less standard accents. Though scholarly enquiry into the effect of speech rate on second language comprehension is nominal, yet it may be underlined that listeners find difficulty in listening to everyday speech in those areas which are spoken rapidly. The speech rate is clearly an important variable in listening comprehension, which declines as the speaker talks faster. The particular speech rate at which the decline takes place varies from one listener to another and also is affected by a number of other text variables, such as vocabulary, syntax or topic, which interact with speech rate.

Besides speech rate, another aspect that affects comprehension is hesitations, which are of unfilled pauses kinds denoting periods of silence, or filled pauses kinds where the speaker uses fillers such as ‘uh’,
‘um’, ‘any way’, or repetition types, or false starts where the speaker stops and then replaces the previous word or phrase.

The hesitation creates a major comprehension problem to the non-native speakers who listen to spontaneous speech. This is evident from the study done by Voss (1979) on 22 non-native speakers of English who were asked to listen to a passage of spontaneous speech of about 210 words long. The result showed that hesitation phenomena clearly occur as a regular and normal part of spoken English and in some cases it can help comprehension, and in others it may cause problems.

3.5 Listening comprehension in second language:

Most of the studies on listening comprehension have been conducted with reference to first language. What remains to be seen in the uniqueness of listening comprehension with reference to second language and to explore the differences between first and second language listening comprehension.

Though not much work has been done to explicate the difference between first and second-language processing, there are certain studies by Lynch (1998), Fishman (1980) which demonstrate that the processes are similar. Both first and second language made similar types of errors. There is no evidence to suppose that second language is in any fundamental way different from first language listening, only in that the
second language listeners have a limited knowledge of the language, which is compensated by transfer from their first language. (Faerch and Kasper, 1986) The native-language listening is impaired when the listener is disinterested and distracted by other thoughts. The second-language listeners have more problems arising out of insufficient knowledge of the language and socio-cultural background or lack of linguistic skills. Since they come from a different background, the second language learners generally lack the textual schemata or other important background knowledge that would help them compensate their lack of linguistic skills. (Aitchison, 1994; Bremer et al., 1996)

This a well known fact that all human beings acquire their first knowledge, and they are capable of understanding complex and subtle ideas. They are also capable of detecting the important cues regarding the speaker's state of mind or attitude towards the message. First language knowledge is inherent, and it is outside conscious awareness. They do not deliberately learn first-language skills, but acquire them at later stage when they interact with the world around them. The first language learners hardly take notice of how comprehension occurs because the cognitive processes that are involved in the first-language comprehension are almost entirely automatic. The second language learners are, however, wanting in this particular felicity. They learn as adult; they can
understand only a few isolated words, and they rarely develop the same high level ability as in their first language. There is a huge gaps of knowledge of the language between the listeners of the first and second language. While studying the proficient subjects and the weaker subjects to see how much time they spend in processing the sound and deriving meaning from what they have heard, Angela Oakeshott-Taylor (1977) concluded that, “the process that takes place with the native speaker in a matter of milliseconds may occur over a longer period of time with the less proficient L2 speaker.” (1997: 48) In fact, there are gaps found in first language, but the gaps in the second language listening have far more affect on comprehension, and the second language listeners compensate this gap by using any other information, which could be visual information, general background knowledge. These compensatory skills are a significant aspect of second language listening. However, these compensatory skills may not always work in case of those second language learners who come from different backgrounds. In such cases, the second language learners are at a disadvantage.

3.6 Approaches to assessing listening comprehension:

Historically there have been three approaches to assessing listening comprehension. These approaches do not represent a coherent and precise set of ideas. Rather there is a considerable overlap between them and they
merely provide a "tendency to emphasize particular aspects of language ability" (Buck, 2001: 61). These approaches are:

(i) discrete-point approach

(ii) integrative approach

(iii) communicative approach

3.6.1 **Discrete-point approach:**

It grew under the influence of structuralism and behaviourism, which were the dominant paradigms for linguistic studies. Audio-lingual method of language teaching was the most preferred one and Lado was the most famous advocate of this method. In tune with structuralism, discrete-point approach believed that units of linguistic knowledge can be identified and isolated into separate bits or elements and each one of these elements can be tested separately. Lado considered listening comprehension to be a process of recognizing the sounds of the language. According to him, basic listening comprehension technique requires "presenting orally to the students an utterance in the goal language and checking to see if the students understand the complete utterance or crucial parts of it." (Lado, 1961: 208) The technique associated with discrete-point approach emphasized on testing the oral forms of the language. The main points for testing listening are phonemic
discrimination tests, for example, testing minimal pairs; paraphrase recognition; response evaluation, etc.

3.6.ii Integrative approach:

Rather than assessing listening comprehension ability bit by bit in isolation, Ohler (1979) suggested integrative approach. It is based on pragmatic expectancy grammar where the emphasis is on the *use* rather than just knowledge of language. According to Ohler, "there are regular and rule-governed relationships between the various elements of the language and that to know a language it is necessary to know how these elements relate to each other ... in terms of language use." (Ohler cited in Buck, 2001: 66-67) Unlike the discrete-point approach which stresses on assessing knowledge about the elements of the language, the integrative approach places emphasis on assessing the processing of language. The associated techniques used in the integrative approach are noise tests, listening cloze, gap filling techniques, dictations, translation, etc.

Dictation, undoubtedly, is the common integrative test of listening upheld by scholars like Lado, Valette, Angela Oakeshott-Taylor. It tests performance at all stages and in all categories of the speech perception process. Recent studies by scholars like Hughes and Weir have also recommended dictation, as it not only provides a good supplement to
other listening tests, but can also serves as a communicative test if the speech rate is fast enough (Cohen, 1994).

3.6.iii Communicative approach:

The movement for communicative testing began with the growing need for communicative second language teaching in a manner that a person can actually use it to communicate in the target language situation, the real-world situation. The language proficiency is more concerned with its use to communicate effectively than the knowledge of it. Hence language proficiency is viewed as communicative competence. Communicative approach to listening comprehension, like the integrative approach, also placed emphasis on testing use of the language for its communicative function, rather than usage. As Carroll puts it, "the use of language is the objective, and the mastery of the formal patterns, or usage of that language is a means to achieve that objective." (Carroll, 1980: 7)

Although there is relevance and importance of communicative approach to assessing listening comprehension, this approach is also surrounded by some problems. As Buck pointed out, it suffers from the problem of generalization. To quote Buck, "[since] in most domains of language use, there are many communicative situations and many contexts, as well as large variety of topics, test sample from these ... generalize ... performance across the whole domain." (Buck, 2001: 84) The techniques
associated with communicative tests includes authentic texts consisting of conversations, announcements, service encounters, directions, lectures, narratives, anecdotes, personal reports, news broadcasts, and debates.

3.7 Construct in listening comprehension:

Construct is necessary to understand how the complex process of listening comprehension works. It can be defined at both theoretical or conceptual level as well as operationalizational level through which listeners performance are assessed on the basis of tasks given from the selected texts. The conceptualization of listening construct is based on theoretical understanding of listening comprehension and on the knowledge of the target-language use situation, while the operationalization is based on the knowledge and experience of the test developers. However, operationalization of the construct may suffer on account of either adding something that should not be there or omitting something that should be there. Messick (1989) refers to these as construct-underrepresentation and construct irrelevant variance (cited in Buck, 2001: 94). The former occurs when the operationalization of the theoretical construct is incomplete, and the latter occurs when the theoretical description of the construct is not included to assess the ability of the listener in the test.
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3.7.i Developing the construct:

There is tremendous importance of listening comprehension along with speaking, reading and writing in general language proficiency, hence it is found in most general proficiency tests for testing academic language ability. There are two ways in which the construct is developed. The construct can be either competence-based or task-based. There is yet another possibility of integrating the two where the construct is based on the interaction between competence and task.

3.7.i.a Competence-based:

Competence-based listening construct are developed by drawing insights from a number of descriptive models of communicative competence. It attempts to describe all the knowledge and skills that are required by the learners for effective use of language. For describing listening ability competence-based listening construct attempts at providing the description of both language competence and strategic competence. The former involves testing the ability of grammatical knowledge, discourse knowledge, pragmatic knowledge and sociolinguistic knowledge. The latter consists of both cognitive strategies, which are the conscious or unconscious mental processes related to comprehending, storing and using linguistic knowledge, and
metacognitive strategies consisting of self-management activities that oversee and manage the cognitive activities.

The framework used in developing competence based listening construct has been adapted from Bachman and Palmer (1996), which is at present most widely accepted general description of language ability among language testers. The term knowledge as used in the framework, means a procedural knowledge or the ability to apply the knowledge in efficient way. The framework is intended to aid test development by describing comprehension, and provide a basis for discussion. It envisages a number of different definitions of the listening construct for different testing purposes, and allows the test-developers to choose those aspects of language competence which supposedly meet the requirements of their tests.

3.7.i.b Task-based:

It addresses the major problem of the competence-based listening construct, namely the difficulty of determining which abilities are required for performance on both target-language use tasks and test-tasks. Still there are certain drawbacks with the task-based construct. First, it fails to provide a well-defined target-language use situation, and, thus, makes it difficult to identity which task is important. Secondly, even if the tasks are identified, accurate replication of the target-language use
tasks may not always be possible. To overcome this problem, construct based on the interaction between competence and task has been developed, which compensates the weaknesses of both the constructs and has proved to be having practical advantages.

3.7.ii Tasks for operationalizing the construct:

Construct is operationalized through a series of tasks, which are exclusively created by test taker. Since a number of different task-types are used in most tests to operationalize the construct, it is important to develop understanding of the tasks need that can represent the whole construct.

3.7.ii.a Task characteristics:

Knowledge of listening task characteristics is essential at the time of designing the test tasks. These test tasks should be able to somehow replicate real-world tasks. Bachman and Palmer (1996) have provided a framework for defining listening task characteristics, which comprises the following components:

3.7.ii.a.1 Characteristics of the setting:

It is the physical characteristics under which the listening takes place. The most important characteristics of the setting that affect the quality of the listening experience are:
a) physical characteristics for ensuring good acoustics and minimal background noise so that test-takers can hear clearly and comfortably.

b) participants
c) time of task

3.7.ii.a.2 Characteristics of the test rubric:

It provides the structure of the test which should be explicit in the test and implicit in language use. It also tells us how the test-takers are to proceed. A real life listening can obtained, according to Brindley (1998), by providing clear, simple and explicit instructions of the well organized and ordered test structure in a predetermined time allotment. Also important is the scoring methods which suggest how the task are scored and how the item scores are combined into test score.

3.7.ii.a.3 Characteristics of the input:

It includes the format of the listening passages, whether they are spoken or recorded, the length of the passage, etc. Also important characteristics of the input are the aspects of language knowledge-grammatical, discourse, pragmatic and sociolinguistic, and the aspects of topical knowledge like cultural, schematic, and general world knowledge. All these are important to understand the passages.
3.7.ii.a.4 Characteristics of the expected response:

Expected response from the test-taker to the task depends on the format and language constructed for this purpose.

3.7.ii.a.5 Relationship between the input and response:

Buck (2001) has slightly modified the framework provided by Backman and Palmer (1996) to include the relationship between the input and response for defining listening task characteristics. According to Buck (2001), relationship depends upon the reactivity i.e. whether the listening is reciprocal, non-reciprocal or adaptive, scope i.e. the range of listening material that must be processed, and directness of relationship with the language of the passage, background knowledge etc.

3.7.ii.b Task interactiveness:

Task interactiveness, according to Bachman and Palmer (1996) refers to:

Ways in which the test-takers areas of language knowledge, metacognitive strategies, topical knowledge, and affective schemata are engaged by the test task.

(Bachman and Palmer cited in Duck, 2001=126)

According to Backman (1991) task has the interactional authenticity if the competence and knowledge engaged by the test task
are those required by the construct definition. Messick (1989) refers to at
as minimal construct under-representation. Buck (2001) points out that
interactiveness can be looked at from two perspectives. The first
perspective, according to Buck, is “to see whether successful completion
of the test task is dependent on comprehension of the text task is
dependent on comprehension of the test” and the second perspective is to
see “whether the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to comprehend
the passage represent the knowledge, skills and abilities in the construct
definition.” (Buck, 2001: 126).

3.7.ii.c Comprehension questions:

These are the most common tasks used to assess listening
comprehension. Comprehension questions are simply designed and
executed through the use of basic procedure. Here the test-takers are
presented a test, who are then asked to answer questions designed to
measure the comprehension of the content. Comprehension questions can
be used to test a wide range of knowledge, skills and abilities, and also a
variety of text types. There may be multiple-choice questions, short
answer questions, false/true type questions or even inference questions in
the comprehension questions.

3.8 Micro-skills of Listening Comprehension:

Listening as a skill has sub-skills which should be understood by
the teacher. There should be exercises for these sub-skills. Brown (2001: 256) lists some of these sub-skills as follows:

1. Retain chunks of language of different lengths in short-term memory.
2. Discriminate among the distinctive sounds of English.
3. Recognize English stress patterns, words in stressed and unstressed positions, rhythmic structure, intonational contours ... etc.
4. Recognize reduced forms of words.
5. Distinguish word boundaries ....
6. Process speech at different rates of delivery.
8. Recognize grammatical word classes (nouns, verbs ... etc.)

Wills (1981: 134) lists a series of micro-skills of listening, which she refers to as ‘enabling skills.’ They are:

1. predicting what people are going to talk about
2. guessing at unknown words or phrases without panicking
3. using one’s knowledge of the subject to help one understand
4. identifying relevant points and rejecting irrelevant ones
5. retaining relevant points through note taking, summarization, etc.
6. recognizing discourse markers and cohesive devices
7. understanding different intonation patterns and uses of stress which provide clue to meaning and social setting
8. understanding inferred information, e.g. speaker's attitude, intension.

3.9 Listening comprehension practice in the classroom:

Ur (1991) points out that the objective of listening comprehension practice in the classroom is to enable the students to learn to function successfully in real-life listening situations. To understand the spoken language, many other components of other skills should be provided. Chastain (1988) divides the listening comprehension into four sequential components. They are: (i) discrimination (ii) perception of message, (iii) auditory memory and (iv) comprehension. He explains them as follows:

The first is the ability to distinguish all the sounds, intonation patterns, and voice qualities in the second language and to discriminate between them and similar sounds in the native tongue. The second is the perception of an entire message produced by a speaker. The third is the ability to hold that message in one's auditory memory until it can be processed. Fourth, the listener processes what the speaker has
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said to comprehend the meaning.

(Chastain, 1988: 193-194)

3.10 Theories of listening comprehension in language learning:

3.10.i Listening comprehension as primary channel for language input and acquisition:

Nida (1957) as cited in Peterson (2001:87) concludes that "learning to speak a language is very largely a task of learning to hear it"; Asher's Total Physical Response Approach (1969) featured a long pre-production phase in which students listened, followed commands and demonstrated their comprehension through non-verbal actions. The Natural Approach of Krashen and Terrell (1983) (cited in Brown, 2001:31) also sets a pre speech period for listening only. They defined three stages. The first one is "the pre-production stage [which] is the development of listening comprehension skill." According to Nord (1981), reception should precede production, because reception enables production. While it is possible to learn to understand without speaking, it is not possible to learn to speak without understanding." (cited in Peterson, 2001:88)

3.10.ii Listening comprehension as a multi-level, interactive process of meaning creation:

When good listeners involve themselves with any type of spoken discourse, a number of processes work on various levels simultaneously
to provide understanding of the incoming speech. The higher level processes (top-down) are driven by listener's expectations and understandings of the context, the topic, and the nature of the world. The lower level processes (bottom-up) are triggered by the sounds, words, and phrases which the listener hears as he or she attempts to decode speech and assign meaning.
Chapter Four
The Study
4.1. **Aims of the study:**

It is a well-known fact that second language learners of English encounter many serious difficulties when attempting to speak using English or just when they listen to English presented by others. El-Sayed states that:

Too often we find students who have an excellent theoretical knowledge of grammar; students who are able to do the most elaborate exercises in grammar, who can break up someone else’s sentences ..., have the greatest difficulty in constructing simple sentences or combining two or three sentences together themselves. Those students have mastered the elements of grammar but lack the power of turning the knowledge to practical ends.

(El-Sayed, 1992 cited in Modhesh, 2005: 12)

The present study will focus on the nature of the problems and difficulties faced by these learners when they listen to English. It explores:
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(i) How much listening is being practiced in the classroom.

(ii) Out of the four skills which one is preferred most?

(iii) What is the status of the listening skill in the classroom?

(iv) What is the attitude of the teachers towards listening?

(v) Do the teachers integrate listening with reading skills and speaking skills in the classroom?

4.2 Pilot study:

The pilot study conducted on the students, both boys and girls, studying in Aligarh Muslim University, to explore ways and means of data collection by interacting with students and teachers. In the pilot study we found that, compared to boys, girls were more responsive, favorably disposed towards me and were more supportive in collection of data and extended every support when being interviewed. We could call them after their classes to ask questions and they supported us fully in both intensive and extensive listening.

4.3. Subjects of the study:

In this study we selected the girls only, not the boys as, the subject of our study. The reason was purely experiential. We arrived at this decision on the basis of our observation and experience gathered during the pilot study.
In our study we included students of B.A. 1st year and 2nd year. Very few students from B.A. final year were also included. Total number of students were 100 representing Linguistics, Political Science, Economics, Sociology and English. Majority of the students had Hindi medium background, followed by Urdu medium. A small number (20) had English medium background.

Some teachers, mostly female, were also included in this study. Total number of teachers were 20 out of which only 8 allowed us to collect the data from their classrooms. They belonged to the faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

4.4 Types of data:

Two types of data were obtained from the respondents in classroom situations.

4.4.i Classroom-based data:

The pilot study conducted earlier partly enabled us to develop familiarity with the teachers. Some of them subsequently allowed us to sit in their classes. However, there were still quite a good number of them who were wary of our presence and very politely declined giving permission to sit in the classroom.

Data based on classroom observation carried information regarding the extent of listening being practiced in the classroom. Also, out of four
skills, which one is preferred most and what is the status of the listening skill in the classroom.

Two kinds of classroom situations were used for generating data out of classroom based observation. These were:

4.4.i.a General classroom situation in which subjects, other than English language and literature were taught.

4.4.i.b Particular classroom situation in which English language and literature were taught.

4.4.ii Interview-based data:

Informal interview was conducted for eliciting attitude of teachers towards listening skill. Here even those teachers were included who had refused to grant permission to sit and observe their teaching in the classroom. Most of them were supportive and willing to discuss their experiences with us at the informal level.

Also included in the interview-based data were the responses of both learners and teachers involved in the learning and teaching of English language and literature. Their responses were elicited to know which one of the skill is closely related to language and literature teaching in the classroom in order of preference.
4.5 Methodology:

Since this study was both experimental and observational kind, the following techniques were used for eliciting the data from our respondents as well as the teachers.

4.5.i Classroom teaching recordings:

Here, we used tape recorders and made our recordings by sitting in the classrooms. For this purpose good quality audio recorders were used. Here considerable attention was given on recording even the extra linguistic features like backchannel, murmuring, coughs, long silences, and irrelevant comments.

4.5.ii Anonymous observation:

Sometimes our presence affected both the teaching and the students' response. When the teachers asked questions to the students, they became conscious in giving their answer in front of us. In that situation we left the tape recorder with the teacher and we merely observed the classroom behavior and noted down our observation in the field diary. Only in few cases where we had established some close familiarity with teachers and students, we could personally record the data in the classroom.
4.6 Task designs:

We designed our tasks based on our construct definition. The construct definition depended on narrower and broader views of assessing listening comprehension. Here we administered different tasks that were appropriate for different constructs.

4.6.i Assessing narrower construct:

For testing the ability to understand short utterances on a literal level, dictation and partial dictation tasks were administered to our respondents. In partial diction part of what the respondents hear was already written down for them.

4.6.ii Assessing broader construct:

For testing the ability to understand longer text carrying information on grammatical knowledge and discourse knowledge, which were spread throughout the text. Here comprehension questions were served to our respondents which had multiple choice question tasks, comprehension passage, etc.

4.6.iii Testing knowledge of the language:

For testing the knowledge of the language, tasks were designed to find out if the respondents were able to recognize minimal pairs with decontextualized words and with words in an utterance, recognize grammatical structures, intonation and stress patterns.
4.7 **Sources of Data:**

There were two sources for obtaining the data. It was obtained on the basis of intensive listening and extensive listening.

4.7.i **Intensive listening:**

In intensive listening we deal with different topics like seminars, paper reading, theatres, classroom teaching. Here we selected classroom teaching, which is very important one. In this situation both teachers and students were part of the classroom where teacher was a speaker and student was a listener. We examined the problem of students that they faced while being taught different subjects through the medium English. In A.M.U. the medium of instruction is English.

4.7.ii **Extensive listening:**

In this situation we focused on television talk show. We recorded the talk show and students were asked to listen and write what they listened word by word.
Chapter Five

Data Interpretation and Analysis
5.1 **Introduction:**

This chapter provides interpretation of data generated through different tasks that were appropriate for different constructs and also helped us in testing knowledge of the language. It also includes those exercises which helped exploring the possibility of integrating listening skill with reading and speaking skills. Data of classroom based observation obtained from different classroom situations have also been interpreted, analyzed and presented in this chapter.

5.2 **Assessing narrower construct:**

To test the ability to understand short utterances, dictation task and partial dictation task were administered.

5.2.i **Dictation task:**

Dictation is an excellent means to improve student listening and writing skills. Here, they get opportunity to hear and pay attention to listen to learn about writing conventions, to listen to ideas related to other disciplines as well as to improve their handwriting and spelling. It proves usefulness for students whose first language is not English.
Dictation exercises were based on a text which was familiar to students. It was selected from their subject course book. Here a short passage was taken because they required concentration. The text was read to the listeners at normal speech so that they could improve their comprehension. Dictation was then given. This exercise was repeated where the text was read again at normal speed. When the dictation was completed the students were asked to check their work and point out mistakes before it was marked by the teacher. The script was given back to them to check, from original text, the spelling and sentences if they have been missed out. The dictation part was to improve listening comprehension and spelling abilities.

Then they were asked to write their favourite words and sentences. They could read their sentences and words aloud. While teacher copied them on the blackboard, students checked their meaning and spelling. Students were not allowed to talk to each other unless the teacher spoke to them.

We observed that initially students were quite slow at taking dictation, because they were not fond of dictations. But after some time they started showing great improvement.

The results showed that initially when the teacher explained meaning of the difficult words and composed few sentences, which were
not complex but simple sentences matching, the students level, all these helped them improve their listening abilities and generated enough motivation and interest among them. These are important considerations for listening comprehension and contribute positively towards improving the listening ability.

5.2.ii Partial dictation task:

Partial dictation task was given to test the listening comprehension and to see if it can help improve the listening ability of the students. In partial dictation part of what the students know was already written down for them.

Text 1:

It was a perfect day. The sun ________ in a clear blue sky and Diana felt that all was ________ with the world. It wasn’t just the weather that made her feel this way. It was also the fact that her husband had ________ agreed to a divorce. More than that, he had agreed to let her keep the house and to pay her a small fortune every month. Life ________ be better.

Original text:

It was a perfect day. The sun shone in a clear blue sky and Diana felt that all was right with the world. It
wasn’t just the weather that made her feel this way. It
was also the fact that her husband had finally agreed
to a divorce. More than that, he had agreed to let her
keep the house and to pay her a small fortune every
moth. Life couldn’t be better.

(Source: Hughes, 2003)

Idea of getting partial dictation was new to our respondents and
they displayed much enthusiasm and interest when His test was
administered. The steps taken in administering dictation test were
repeated here also. The result showed that this test contributed immensely
towards listening comprehension and in quite useful in improving
listening ability.

5.3 Assessing broader construct:

For testing the ability to understand longer texts several
comprehension exercises were served to our respondents.

5.3.i Multiple choice question tasks:

Here the listeners were provided four alternatives for a single line
text and while listening to the text they were asked to choose one correct
alternative. The respondents’ ability to understand and select correct
alternative was judged by the way they were able to identify the intent
underlying the text. Each text administered here had some underlying
intent, like request, suggestions help, recognition etc. Some examples used here were:

(a) When demonstrators block the road, how should police behave to stop them?
1. They should ask them to stop their demonstration immediately.
2. The demonstrators should be warned to stop otherwise police will follow rule.
3. They should say only what the law requires.
4. They should just be a passive spectator.

(b) I suppose you will help me in learning my subject?
1. I suppose it will happen so.
2. Of course I can.
3. You can think.
4. Not at all.

(c) I have been thinking that why don’t we invite Seema on dinner?
1. Is it her idea?
2. Is it necessary?
3. Yes you can.
4. Why don’t you call her?
5.3.ii Comprehension test:

Comprehension passage was given to test the ability to listen and understand longer text. After giving the passage the respondents were asked to answer the questions, which were provided towards the end of the passage.

Text 2:

Little Rishi had a plaster on his knee. He was worried it would hurt when it was taken off. His mother said she would do it by magic!

Rishi’s mother sat down beside him.

“Close your eyes”, she said. Rishi closed them.

“Now what can you see?”

“Dark”.

“Look harder. Can you see any stars in the darkness?”

“Oh yes,” said Rishi. “Stars and Moonlight and everything is covered with thick snow. Is it cold?”

“Yes. It’s very cold.” And Rishi snuggled closer to his mother. But he kept his eyes light shut. “Can you see anything else” his mother asked, as she put her arm around Rishi.
"A palace. A Palace made of glass. It's beautiful!"

Rishi gazed and gazed at the picture behind his closed eyelid.

"Now, why don't you look at your knee"? mother said quietly. So Rishi did.

"My plaster has gone! My plaster has gone! How did you do it?"

"By Magic," said his mother.

**Answer the following questions:**

1. Did Rishi really want his plaster off?

2. Mention three things which Rishi could see when he closed his eyes.

3. Why did Rishi snuggle closer to his mother?

4. Explain how you think, Rishi's mother managed to get the plaster off without Rishi knowing about it.

5. Rishi's mother said it was done by Magic. Do you agree? Now would you answer the question, "What is magic"?

6. Which words in the passage mean the opposite of these?
A note about the passage:

This is a listening comprehension passage. It has question and answer format similar to which teachers may have seen in textbooks. This kind of passage are great for teachers who want to have some measure of control over what their students listen to and also test what kind of comprehension they would like. It was served to the respondents because it gave them more extended listening scripts with a greater range of comprehension skills and question answering capability, and provided them incremental practice in listening comprehension leading to confidence. It also allowed teachers to “whip up” very thorough listening comprehension exercise which is versatile and it can be applied for different purposes.

The main objective in giving this passage was to ensure that students get practice with listening to passages and texts in addition to understanding them in reading, because there are different attention skills required and listening tends to be somewhat harder.

Result showed that students were benefited from this listening comprehension. This kind of tests or experiments can be utilized for assessing listening comprehension of this nature. It not only helps in testing students listening ability but also helps them how to read text.
5.4 Testing knowledge of the language:

5.4.i Minimal pairs:

Here the minimal pairs were given in decentextualized words. The respondents were made to listen two or three words to indicate whether they were the same or different. This exercise helps in developing not only pronunciation skills, but also comprehension and recognition skills.

Here, minimal pairs were given to distinguish minor differences between English vowel sounds. List of minimal pairs were introduced by writing on the board, for example,

sit – set – sat

cut – caught

sing – sang

Our respondents were asked to identify two vowel sounds which they wanted to focus on and identify them in the examples given below:

call curl
export expert
lawn learn
walk work
left laughed
vest vast
blessed blast
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>noon</th>
<th>none</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>soon</td>
<td>son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>super</td>
<td>supper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>steady</td>
<td>study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>many</td>
<td>money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>empire</td>
<td>umpire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here teachers made students to practice comprehension skills by using the lists of minimal pairs. When the students while practicing became comfortable with the sounds they started reading sentence. Here, the students were asked to identify which word of each pair was used in the sentence.

Minimal pairs were also given with words in an utterance. Here the listener, while listening to the teacher, changes the English sounds and retains the phonetic patterns of his mother tongue. For example,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'measure'</th>
<th>/me3(r)/</th>
<th>/me2(r)/</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'treasure'</td>
<td>/tre3#/</td>
<td>/tre2(r)/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'reaction'</td>
<td>/ri(z)(\j)#/</td>
<td>/ri(z)(\k)#/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'should'</td>
<td>/(u)d/</td>
<td>/(u)d/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'function'</td>
<td>/(f)(\j)(k)#/</td>
<td>/(f)(\j)(k)#/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4.ii Grammatical structure:

1. Respondents were made to listen to a sentence and indicate,
(a) whether the verb was singular or plural in the following sentences:

(i) This brand of sweets very popular in kids (is/are)

(ii) The best way of seeing cities to take taxis (is/are)

(iii) Which of these cities you been to (has/have)

(iv) The police along with the dogs searching this area
     (is/are)

(v) Hari a million dollar smile (has/have)

Here, almost all the respondents gave the correct answer because choice was given to them.

(b) change the nouns from masculine or feminine in the following sentences:

(i) The emperor (empress) loved the (princess) prince very much.

(ii) The boy (girl) saw a lion (lioness) and a tiger (tigress) at the zoo.

(iii) Tell your husband (wife) to see the gentleman (lady).

(iv) The only son (daughter) of a rich man (woman) is likely to be spoiled.

Result showed that the respondents were able to change the gender correctly.

(c) Whether the verb was in present, past or future tense in the following sentence:

(i) She leaves/is leaving for Delhi tonight.
(ii) Her train leaves/is leaving at 7 p.m.

(iii) I see, am seeing him three times a week.

(iv) I see/am seeing a homeopath these days.

(v) Do you believe / are you believing in ghosts?

(vi) I go/went/there daily.

(vii) My father is/was here today.

The results for this kind of exercises were almost correct.

5.4.iii Intonation patterns:

Sentences were given to identify intonation patterns in English.

(i) I’m afraid of them.

(ii) The door has been opened.

(iii) I want to finish this work/before he returns.

(iv) Please do it now/ if you have time.

(v) If he comes back by tomorrow/ we can manage the show.

(vi) They have plenty of time/ but we have not / inspite of the holidays.

Here oblique was used to indicate a pause. Since intonation provides grammatical information about the sentence, the respondents were asked to indicate the difference between the following pairs of sentences:

(i)a. He is arriving late (statement)

b. He is arriving late (question)
(ii)a. Shut the door (command)

b. Shut the door (request)

The differences were not recognized by the respondents fully well.

5.4.iv Stress pattern:

Change in the stress pattern leads to change in the parts of speech of the word. There are a good many noun-adjective-verb oppositions in English such as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Noun/adjective</th>
<th>Verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>absent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>import</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>export</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>protest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The result showed that the respondents were not able to clearly recognize the differences on account of change in stress pattern.

5.5 Integrating listening with reading and speaking:

With a view to exploring the possibility of integrating listening with reading and speaking, several exercises were administered in which the prompts and strategies of reading and speaking were used. For instance, reading aloud, repeated reading, providing contextual clues and background information, substitution and simplification activities etc.,
and use of spoken language or language of home etc. are the strategies and prompts which are categorically used in reading and speaking skills, respectively. For establishing differences in the output, in a number of cases listening categories, different cases studies were conducted without and with the use of these strategies and prompts. Here Brown’s (1949) taxonomy of listening categorization was used, which made distinction between receptive listening skills and reflective listening skills. According to Brown, receptive skills are primarily to do with accuracy in listening, like the ability to recall, the ability to keep related details in mind, the ability to observe a single detail, the ability to follow oral directions. Reflective skills, according to Brown, include the ability to use contextual clues, to recognize organizational elements, the ability to deduce meanings, intentions, purposes, the ability to draw justifiable inferences, etc.

5.5.i Reception listening skills: Recall

5.5.i.a Summarizing:

The objective of this study conducted with reference to recall was to understand the amount of attention paid by the respondents when asked to summarize the text. For this purpose the amount of attention, the following news broadcast was read aloud only once by the researcher and the respondents were asked to summarize:
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Text 3:

A family of three was rescued today from under a mountain of snow where they had been surviving without food and without heat for the past three days. Leonard and Elsa Smyth and their daughter Liane, all of Valley View, miraculously survived as they waited for a rescue team to reach them after the blizzard in the mountains north of Lake Tahoe. They are all being treated at Oakland Community Hospital for hypothermia.

(Source of the text: Rost, 1994)

(Key points regarding this text: difficult words, unfamiliar names of persons and place, unfamiliar word)

Result:

i) Many of them had difficulty summarizing the text.

ii) Some did summarize but left out details such as person and place names, name of the disease.

iii) Some provided only the gist i.e. the main points of the story.

iv) Some pointedly said that the difficulty was an account of attention factors.

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However, when the same text was repeatedly read aloud (3-4 times) and language of home was used to explain the text, there was qualitative difference in the result. For instance, some more respondents were able to summarize the text and clearly admitted that repetition of the text helped them pay more attention. What still prevailed as a common factor was with regard to the recall of difficult and unfamiliar words and names of persons and place.

5.5.ii.b Filling the gist of the missing text:

This study was conducted for finding out the strategies used by the respondents when asked to fill in the gist of the missing text. The following gaped text was used here:

Text 4a:

1. hello everybody /

2. today _____ continue _____ discussions of social psychology /

3. _____ talking about _____ major influences _____ /

4. and on our behaviors /

5. I _____ start _____ idea _____ concept of a noun /

6. _____

7. _____ familiar with _____
8. a norm _____ standard of behavior /
9. or _____ thinking _____
10. and we find that all groups of people have norms /
11. for an array _____
12. for basic things like the food they eat /
13. _____
14. _____
15. behavior and decisions /
16. I would like to give you an example of a norm /
17. OK first I'm going to give you some names of some food items /
18. _____
19. or have eaten these before /

Text 4b:

The original text is:

1. hello everybody /
2. today I’d like to continue
3. by talking about some of the major influences on our attitudes.
4. and on our behaviours/
5. I’d like to start by defining an idea which is the concept of a norm /

6. N-O-R-M

7. Most of you here are familiar with this term a norm is simply a standard of behaviour

8. or attitude or thinking about something

9. and we find that all groups of people have norms /

10. for an array of attitudes and behaviours.

11. for basic things like the food they eat

12. things they wear

13. literally any sort of

14. behaviour and decisions

15. I would like to give you an example

16. OK first I’m going to give you some names of some food items!

17. now you probably eat

18. or have eaten these before /

This text was read aloud once only.
Result:

i) In most cases our respondents filled in the gaps. Here the fill-ins were very close to what was read aloud in the beginning of the exercise.

ii) Gist of the missing texts was provided through the use of paraphrasing. Sometimes tenses were changed in the beginning but later the original tense was kept intact.

Respondents were asked to listen to recording from the radio to indicate the type of program they were listening (sports, news, weather). For understanding the gist of the news, the respondents were provided worksheet and were then asked to listen to the news carefully and decide which category the news item belonged to. The worksheet had the following format:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political / Government</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General news</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weather</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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First the main titles and headlines were tuned so that they can listen in order to get general idea. After this the entire recorded news was played, which is reproduced as Text 5.

Text 5:

“This is NDTV news read by Prakash. Here are the headlines. Overseas, a shake-up in the currency and stock market. America is ready to intervene in the Pakistan Government establishment; and in Noida the double murder case accused held. Other items in the news are student demonstrations, aboriginal cricketers.

The news in detail after this break.”

The tape was stopped and the respondents were asked to tick the category to which the news belongs to. Respondents listened to the news 3 times and then marked the category to which the news belonged to. It was observed that with regard to some news, on respondents were quite close to being sure about the place it would find in the category. For instance, ‘currency’, ‘stock market’ represented clearly the Economics category, but they began with identifying Business category. Later when clues were provided they placed it in Economics category. One aspect of unsurity was with regard to ‘aboriginal cricketers.’ Here when clues were given, they were able to identify it as belonging to sports category.
In the reception listening skill for recall, teachers role was significant. The teacher focused on listening, and a lot of conversation was made between teacher-student. Here, the teacher had twin goals – she focused on the development of language skills and also learning skills. She focused on top-down processing strategies by encouraging the respondents to utilize their background knowledge. This task was totally under teacher’s control and the students play a passive role.

5.5.ii Reflective listening skills:

5.5.ii.a Conversational tasks:

In the conversational tasks, conversational excerpts were given to the respondents by using the conversational technique. In the selection of the excerpts preference was given to those excerpts in which the presence of the speaker was indirect. Each excerpt was accompanied by the information about the social context, provided in parenthesis, and the respondents were asked to establish the intention of the speaker.

Text 6(i):

Student (standing): I think this is my chair.

(two students in library, one sitting, the other standing).

Text 6(ii):

A: Are you going home now?

(two colleagues leaving office)
Result:

In case of both the text our respondents were able to establish the intention of the speaker whose presence was indirect. They were also able to give some reasons for the speakers being indirect. Though the data was very small, it does point out the fact that listening is an important aspect of any conversation.

Another set of conversational task was given to the respondents in which they were asked to listen to two conversational instructions like:

a. [Turn off the lights before you leave]
b. [Pull the chain to stop the train]

They were then asked to listen to instructions carefully and create conversation in which the following phrases must be used by the listeners:

All right,
Okay,
Done.

Similarly speakers were asked to give instructions clearly and show through conversation that the listener has understood the instructions well.

The respondents were able to construct conversation very well by keeping into consideration all those instructions that were given to them.
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5.5.ii.b Listening types and purpose:

Here, the listening types were related with the general purpose for listening assumed by the listeners, Galvin (1985) in his study has identified four categories of listening types with typical corresponding purposes. These are:

1. transactional listening : learning new information
2. international listening : recognizing personal component
3. critical listening : of message
4. recreational listening : evaluating reasoning and evidence appreciating an event

In this study only two listening types were considered, namely transactional and interactional and task was given accordingly to get the purpose for listening. Here a small skit was recorded and given to the respondents. For transactional listening they were asked to paraphrase the message, compare and contrast information, and summarize the main points.

In case an interactional listening the respondents were asked to recognize levels of meaning for establishing and intentions and underlying feelings of the speaker and give reasons for the way speaker sees things or experiences events in a certain way.
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Result:

i) comparison and contrast was relatively easy.

ii) recognition of intentions and feelings was also effectively shown by the respondents.

iii) regarding attributing reasons for the way speaker sees things or experience events in a certain way, it was observed that the context and the visual image enabled the respondents to recognize these levels of meaning.

iv) difficulty are with regard to summary and paraphrasing.

v) when contextual clues and some background knowledge were provided to the respondents, this improved their performance and they were able to summarize the main points and paraphrases the message well.

5.6 Observations based on classroom situation:

Two types of classroom situations were used for generating the data out of classroom-based observation:

i) general classroom situation in which subjects, other than English language and literature, were taught,

ii) particular classroom situation in which English language and literature were taught.

In the first type the following observations were made:
i) Listening has been given lowest order of preference in both general classroom situation and particular classroom situation in which English language and literature were taught.

ii) Despite the lowest order of preference assigned to it, by and large in every classroom situation the teacher began the class with the exhortation of the command “listen” and its varying stylistic forms like “listen first”, “try to listen”, “listen to what is being said.”

iii) Reading strategies like reading aloud, providing contextual clues and background information, substitution and simplifications activities, etc. were rarely used in an explicit manner.

iv) Although the medium of instruction is English, some of the teachers were regularly found using Urdu/Hindi for imparting instructions in the classrooms.

v) Hindi/Urdu was used not with a view to familiarizing the students with textual difficulties, but move with a view to cultivating feel of ease and sense of relaxation in the classroom environment.

vi) There were certain textual difficulties which were neither explained through the use of spoken language nor were simplified by providing equivalent expressions in learners L1.

In the second type, responses of both learners and teachers were elicited to know which one of the skill is closely related to language and
literature teaching in the classroom in order of preference. The following responses were obtained:

i) Majority of the learners pointed out that mostly the reading skill is related to literature teaching. In the order of preference it is followed by writing, speaking and listening skills. However, when it comes to teaching language, the most important skill is reading followed by speaking and writing. Listening skills, according to most of the respondents, were not required to be taught separately as “it is passively being received by us,” and “most of communication time is spent in listening.”

ii) Teachers’ response was also almost the same. They also pointed out that it is the reading skill which is closely related to literature teaching in the classroom, and in the order of preference reading is followed by writing, speaking and listening.

However, the teachers differed in their response with regard to language teaching in the classroom. They, by and large, expressed the need to teach listening skill but it may not be “over emphasized” in particular. They pointed out that it should be a part of reading skill and should, therefore, remain “second fiddle” to the receptive skills in which reading “occupies a major position.”
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Conclusion
The present study was aimed at making a pedagogic exploration into listening comprehension skills and examine the problems faced by learned in advanced ESL classroom situation at A.M.U.

To analyse this problem two very important processes were considered, namely, top-down process and bottom-up process. It was found that top-down process worked well as our respondents regularly used their previous knowledge of the context to make sense of what is being said in the class. They were able to understand the lectures fully well, which became amply clear from the studies conducted on them. However, the bottom-up process did not prove effective, because our respondents were well versed in language skills and were already aware of the English structure. Hence, not much decoding was required to understand the input from the smallest meaningful units to complete texts. They were already able to derive the meaning from the context, situation and knowledge of the prior events.

Several tasks, which were appropriate for different constructs and helpful in testing the listening ability of the respondents, were administered or them. Some of those tasks were already in practice and
the teachers were using them for testing the listening ability of the students. Here dictation task was one of them along with multiple-choice questions, summarizing task and comprehension test. Some were never used at all for instance, partial dictation task, task meant for filling the gist of the missing text, tasks relating listening types and purpose, and some kinds of specially designed tasks to test knowledge of the language. Although conversational tasks are in use in those classes where the emphasis is on communicative language teaching, we hardly found this task being administered in the class.

Respondents were given dictation exercises based on the text which was familiar to them. Only a short passage was taken which was read by the teacher. The general practice in the classroom was to give dictation in one go, which was perceived by the students as boring and trite. However, when it was given by introducing some innovations, we found our respondents very motivated. It generated interest in them and thus helped to improve their ability. If extra effort is made by teachers in the classroom dictation can be made exciting.

Testing listening comprehension based on partial dictation never existed in practice. It was new to our respondents and they displayed much enthusiasm and interest when it was administered.
Minimal pair exercises helped the listeners to select the correct word for using sentences. These exercises helped them to differentiate between words on the basis of sounds with minor differences. Minimal pairs were given in decontextualized words and words in an utterance, and those exercises helped them in developing not only pronunciation skills but also comprehension and recognition skills.

Multiple choice questions helped listeners to retain number of choices when answering or questioning any sentence. The listener can use any other sentences also other than one.

When knowledge of the language was tested with regard to grammatical structure, the respondents did very well without committing any major mistake. It shows that they have command over grammar.

However, problems were noticed with regard to stress or accent differences and intonation patterns in English. We found that no special care is given to teach intonation patterns and stress patterns in the classroom at practical level. These were mostly taught as part of theory and no specific exercise-based training was given in the classroom. Hence these were not recognized easily by listeners.

With regard to comprehension passage, it was found that respondents benefit a lot from comprehension passage based exercises as
they help them in developing both listening comprehension and reading skills.

Results derived out of the studies conducted here with reference to reception listening skill and reflective listening skills clearly point out that there is strong closeness between listening skill and the other two skills, namely reading and speaking. What is, therefore, required is an integrated approach in which the development of listening is tied intimately to the development of reading, speaking and writing. Listening skills must not be seen as a mechanistic and separate activity.

The justification for integration can be seen from the results obtained from different studies conducted by us. Whatever task designs we had used in our study, we observed that all these required skills for achieving listening skills. For instance, in the case of dictation or partial dictation, where part of what the respondents heard was already written down for them, respondents required the ability to write English to understand writing convention, spellings; comprehension passage required the ability to reading and a little bit of writing ability; multiple-choice items required a great deal of reading ability; the reflective listening skills for deducing meanings, intentions, purposes required speaking skills; etc. Even the use of commands like ‘listen’, ‘listen first’, try to listen’, ‘listen to what is being said’, etc. given by the teachers,
which were part of the opening statement in a classroom situation, reiterate the closeness, and makes a case for integration. Whether it is reading aloud strategy used to enhance the comprehension ability, or the use of conversational technique, our results convincingly suggest that when listening skill is taught in conjunction with reading and speaking skills it will make a positive impact on the listening comprehension. Therefore, one must have a whole language approach and the teaching of language skills must follow certain order in which reading come first followed by speaking and then writing.
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