

**THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF LISTENING  
COMPREHENSION IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

*(Historical-conceptual review)*

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**Abstract:** *The review article outlines the evolution of listening comprehension in L2 education, from being seen as a passive skill to a complex, active process requiring explicit instruction. Initially assumed to develop naturally, listening difficulties became a major barrier to language acquisition, prompting researchers to redefine listening as a cognitively demanding skill involving processes like attention and inference. This shift led to instructional models designed to enhance listening skills through targeted strategies. The passage also notes that these changes in listening instruction were influenced by broader educational theories, underscoring how evolving pedagogical trends have shaped modern L2 listening comprehension methods.*

**Key words:** *evolution, listening comprehension, second language (L2), cognitive process, instructional models, metacognitive skills, pedagogy, educational psychology.*

**Abstract:** *Ushbu maqolada L2 til o'qitish metodika ta'limi evolyutsiyasi jarayonida tinglab tushunish ko'nikmasiga passiv nutq ko'nikmasidan faol nutq ko'nikmasigacha bo'lgan adabiyotlar sharhi keltirilgan. Dastlab tabiiy ravishda rivojlanadi deb taxmin qilingan tinglab tushunishdagi qiyinchiliklar tilni egallash uchun katta to'siq bo'lib, tadqiqotchilarni tinglashni diqqat va xulosa chiqarish kabi jarayonlarni o'z ichiga olgan kognitiv mahorat sifatida qayta aniqlashga undadi. Ushbu siljish metakognitiv strategiyalar orqali tinglash qobiliyatini oshirishga mo'ljallangan o'quv modellariga olib keladi. Maqolada, shuningdek, tinglab tushunishni o'rgatishdagi ushbu o'zgarishlarga kengroq ta'lim nazariyalari ta'sir ko'rsatganligi va rivojlanayotgan pedagogik tendentsiyalar zamonaviy L2 tinglab tushunish usullarini qanday shakllantirganligini ta'kidlab o'tilgan.*

**Kalit so'zlar:** *evolyutsiya, tinglab tushunish, ikkinchi til (L2), kognitiv jarayon, o'qitish modellari, metakognitiv ko'nikmalar, pedagogika, ta'lim psixologiyasi.*

**Аннотация:** *В обзорной статье рассматривается эволюция понимания аудирования в обучении второму языку (L2) — от восприятия его как пассивного навыка до осознания его как сложного, активного процесса, требующего явного обучения. Первоначально предполагалось, что навык аудирования развивается естественным образом, однако*

*трудности с аудированием стали значительным препятствием для освоения языка, что побудило исследователей переосмыслить аудирование как когнитивно сложный навык, включающий такие процессы, как внимание и выводы. Этот сдвиг привел к разработке моделей обучения, направленных на развитие навыков аудирования с использованием целевых стратегий. В статье также отмечается, что изменения в обучении аудированию были обусловлены более широкими теориями образования, что подчеркивает влияние развивающихся педагогических тенденций на современные методы развития навыков аудирования на втором языке.*

**Ключевые слова:** эволюция, понимание аудирования, второй язык (L2), когнитивный процесс, модели обучения, метакогнитивные навыки, педагогика, образовательная психология.

## INTRODUCTION

Listening is a complex and dynamic cognitive process, rather than a mere passive reception of spoken communication. According to Rivers and Temperley ([2], p. 63), listening comprehension should be understood as an active process in which individuals construct meaning from a continuous stream of auditory input, utilizing their knowledge of the phonological, semantic, and syntactic structures of the language. O'Malley et al. ([1], p. 418) similarly define listening comprehension as an active process whereby individuals selectively focus on particular aspects of auditory input, derive meaning from the discourse, and integrate it with their pre-existing knowledge. Vandergrift ([2], p. 168) further elaborates that listening involves a complex set of tasks, including the discrimination of sounds, understanding vocabulary and grammatical structures, interpreting prosodic features such as stress and intonation, retaining information, and contextualizing it both within the immediate discourse and the broader sociocultural framework of the utterance. Listening comprehension is a conscious and dynamic activity that allows learners to construct understanding through cognitive processes and contextual interpretation. Extensive research underscores the pivotal role of listening comprehension in language pedagogy, with Dunkel [4] asserting that it has become a central focus in the development of second language acquisition theory, teaching methodologies, and empirical research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

The Listening Process is according to Lynch [5] is an ongoing process where listeners actively build and adjust their understanding of spoken language in a specific context. This process involves interpreting acoustic signals and making sense of them using various cognitive resources, such as prior knowledge and context, to achieve a clear communicative goal. Listening is essential in all forms of

communication and occurs repeatedly in every interaction. As such, it is a crucial element of language learning, helping learners exchange information effectively and respond appropriately in conversations. The importance of listening in language education lies in its role in developing both comprehension and communication skills.

*What is the Listening comprehension history?*

Table 1. *Listening comprehension history*

Time Period	Key Concepts	Instructional Focus	Major Theories/Models	Key Developments
Pre-1940s - 1940s	Listening defined as message transmission and recreation.	Assumed that exposure to language would lead to mastery in listening skills.	Initial simplistic view of listening as a passive skill.	Listening was not yet considered a prominent skill. Exposure was believed to naturally lead to comprehension.
1960s	Influence of behaviorism. Listening defined as analyzing and classifying input.	Focus on perception and decoding phonemes, word stress, and sentence-level intonation. Drills for sound discrimination.	Audiolingual Method: Listening was taught through drills and repetitive tasks.	Listening was seen as a mechanical process. The osmosis approach: learners improve listening skills by constant exposure to the language without direct instruction.
1970s-1980s	Listening defined as interpreting the cultural significance of speech behavior.	Focus on responding to spoken texts in contextually and socially appropriate ways. Authentic recordings and expert interaction.	Interactionist & Sociolinguistic Movements: Emphasis on cultural context and interaction in language comprehension.	Listening instruction incorporated real-world input like learner dialogues, face-to-face talk, and authentic recordings. Strategy-based learning emerged.
1990s	Listening as parallel processing of input.	Focus on communicative interaction and strategies for comprehension. Emphasis on authentic listening experiences.	Comprehensible Input (Krashen), Total Physical Response (Asher), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).	Shift to viewing listening as parallel processing. CLT methodology emphasized listening as key for communication. Social-cognitive models of comprehension.
Post-1990s	New models of listening comprehension introduced.	Focus on strategic listening, coping with comprehension challenges.	Ongoing development of models that describe listening comprehension. Social-Cognitive Models.	Continuous refinement of theoretical models explaining listening comprehension.

Table 1 shows the historical developments and changes in how listening comprehension has been defined, taught, and understood in language learning, from the pre-1940s through the 1990s to the present.

The history of listening comprehension in language learning evolved significantly from the 1940s to the present, shaped by various educational theories and instructional approaches:

Pre-1940s - 1940s: Listening was seen as a passive skill, primarily defined by message transmission and recreation. The assumption was that exposure to language would naturally lead to mastery of listening skills. [6], [7], [8]

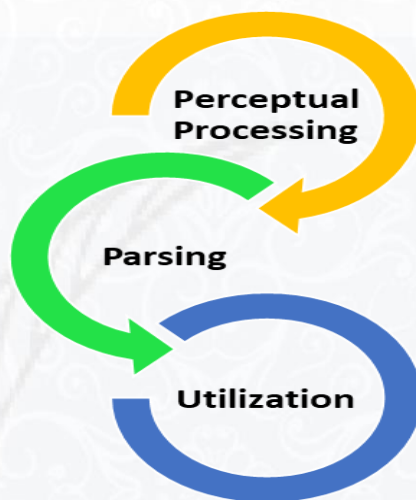
1960s: Under the influence of behaviorism, listening was framed as a process of analyzing and classifying input. Instruction focused on phonemes, stress, and intonation, with drills designed to improve sound discrimination. Listening skills were expected to develop naturally through constant exposure (the "osmosis" approach), with little direct teaching. [9], [10], [11], [12]

1970s-1980s: Listening began to be defined as the interpretation of speech behavior, influenced by interactionist and sociolinguistic theories. Instruction focused on contextually appropriate responses to spoken texts, with an emphasis on authentic materials like recordings and learner interactions. Researchers recognized that effective language learners used strategies to acquire listening skills. [9]

1990s: Listening was viewed as parallel processing of input, influenced by Krashen's theories of comprehensible input and Asher's total physical response method. The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methodology highlighted the importance of listening for real-world communication. The need for strategic listening to improve comprehension became more prominent. [14], [15]

Post-1990s: New models continued to refine the understanding of listening comprehension, incorporating social-cognitive approaches. There was an increasing focus on teaching listening strategies to cope with comprehension challenges and enhance learning outcomes. [9] Listening comprehension has shifted from a passive, mechanical process to an active, strategic skill that requires contextual and cultural understanding, social interaction, and targeted instructional strategies.

Besides, we should also analyze another important phenomenon in the history of listening, it is about the stages of listening which were developed by Anderson. [16]



**Table 2. The categorization of Anderson's Three Stages of Listening Comprehension:**

Stage	Description	Key Concepts	Influencing Factors
<b>Perceptual Processing</b>	Focuses on attention to sounds stored in echoic memory. Listeners identify meaningful sounds and keywords, guided by contextual information.	Attention, echoic memory, meaningful sounds, contextual cues	Quality of input, attention, linguistic knowledge
<b>Parsing</b>	Listeners convert words into meaningful mental representations to retain in short-term memory.	Mental representation, short-term memory (STM), linguistic knowledge	Quality of input, linguistic knowledge, topic familiarity
<b>Utilization</b>	Listeners associate incoming information with existing knowledge stored in long-term memory (LTM), constructing meaning based on this knowledge.	Long-term memory (LTM), schemata, propositions, activation of knowledge	Existing knowledge, schemata, long-term memory activation

This model describes how listening comprehension involves a series of connected stages, from processing sounds to making meaningful associations with prior knowledge. To analyze Anderson's Three Stages of Listening Comprehension, we can break down each stage's function, relevance, and implications for language learning.

1. **Perceptual Processing:** In this stage, listeners focus on important sounds, keywords, and context to aid in meaning construction. Attention and memory play key roles here. "Implication" which means effective listening requires focused attention and good auditory memory, with input quality influencing comprehension.
2. **Parsing:** The listener transforms sounds into mental representations stored in short-term memory. The listener's linguistic knowledge and familiarity with the topic

affect how well they process this information. “Implication” which means vocabulary and topic familiarity are crucial for understanding spoken language.

3. Utilization: Listeners connect the incoming information to existing knowledge stored in long-term memory, using schemata and prior knowledge to make sense of the message. “Implication” which means background knowledge is essential for effective comprehension, and this stage emphasizes the importance of activating prior learning. [17] Overall, the model highlights the cognitive processes involved in listening, suggesting that language teaching should focus on improving attention, vocabulary, and background knowledge to enhance listening comprehension.

Furthermore, there are three scholars’ concepts which also influence on listening comprehension development. They are given in the table 3.

**Table 3. Three key concepts of listening**

Model	Key Components	Explanation
McLaughlin et al.'s Attention Processing Model	Attention Category: Focal and Peripheral attention Processing Category: Controlled and Automatic processing	Learners actively organize incoming information using cognitive schemata. Attention is divided between the main idea and other message characteristics. Processing moves from controlled to automatic over time.
Bialystok's Model of Explicit and Implicit Knowledge	Levels: Input, Knowledge, Output Types of Knowledge: Explicit linguistic knowledge, Implicit linguistic knowledge, Other knowledge	Listening comprehension starts with input exposure, followed by the storage of explicit and implicit linguistic knowledge. Explicit knowledge protects new information, while implicit knowledge serves as a working system.
Nagle and Sanders' L2 Listening Comprehension Model	Components: Prior knowledge from long-term memory, New incoming information	Comprehension is seen as a reciprocal process where meaning is constructed from both new input and prior knowledge, drawing on theories from Krashen, Bialystok, and McLaughlin.

The table 3 summarizes the core ideas of each model, highlighting how attention, knowledge, and memory interact in the listening comprehension process. The three models of listening comprehension each provide distinct insights into the cognitive processes involved:

1. McLaughlin et al.'s Attention Processing Model: Focuses on how learners organize incoming information through focal and peripheral attention, and progress from controlled to automatic processing. The model emphasizes the role of attention and restructuring in developing listening comprehension over time. [18], [19], [20].

2. Bialystok's Model of Explicit and Implicit Knowledge: Differentiates between explicit (conscious) and implicit (intuitive) knowledge. Listening comprehension is viewed as processing input and transferring explicit knowledge to implicit knowledge, with an emphasis on language internalization. [21]

3. Nagle and Sanders' L2 Listening Comprehension Model: Highlights the interaction between prior knowledge from long-term memory and new information in listening tasks. It proposes that comprehension is a reciprocal process, with both knowledge and incoming data contributing to understanding. [22]. These models highlight the cognitive nature of listening, with attention, knowledge organization, and memory playing central roles in comprehension. However, they focus primarily on cognitive processes, overlooking other factors like emotional and social influences on listening. Table 4. gives a more scientifically detailed table on the current understanding of L2 listening comprehension, emphasizing research-based advancements:

Aspect	Scientific Insights
Focus on Strategy Training	The role of strategy training in L2 listening has emerged as a central theme in recent decades. Empirical evidence suggests that the frequency and type of strategies (e.g., cognitive, metacognitive) significantly differentiate successful and unsuccessful learners (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Vandergrift, 2003). Learners who actively engage in strategy use demonstrate superior listening comprehension outcomes compared to those who rely on passive listening (Goh, 2008). Recent studies further confirm that these strategies can be taught and refined, and their application leads to improved listening skills across various contexts (Rubin, 1994; Vandergrift, 2007).
Metacognitive Strategies	The metacognitive approach, initially proposed by Vandergrift (2004), posits that learners can regulate their comprehension using processes such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating their listening. This approach helps raise learners' awareness of the listening process, enhancing their ability to cope with complex tasks. Research suggests that successful listeners consistently use these metacognitive processes in a structured cycle, which has been shown to significantly improve listening outcomes (Mendelsohn, 1994; Vandergrift, 2007). Later studies expanded the cycle to integrate further metacognitive activities, such as verification and evaluation, leading to better understanding and retention (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).
Cognitive Load and Listening	Cognitive load theory is fundamental in understanding how learners manage multiple streams of information during listening tasks (Sweller, 1988). Cognitive overload occurs when listeners cannot process all the information at once, resulting in impaired comprehension. The cognitive load associated with listening tasks is influenced by factors such as speech rate, accent, complexity of content, and background noise. Research has shown that learners need to optimize their cognitive resources by using efficient strategies to ensure effective processing (Paas et al., 2003). High levels of cognitive load can be alleviated through task simplification and strategy training (Sweller & Chandler, 1994).
Interaction and Social Contexts	Interactionist theories emphasize that listening comprehension is enhanced through interactive processes, where listeners actively engage with speakers and negotiate meaning (Long, 1996). Interactive listening, such as in peer discussions, real-world dialogues, and group activities, promotes deeper cognitive engagement and facilitates receptive skills development (Gass & Mackey, 2007). Studies also indicate that feedback and clarification requests further support comprehension, particularly in real-time conversational contexts (Pica et al., 1996). These findings highlight the importance of social interaction in fostering listening proficiency.
Authentic Listening Materials	Authentic materials, such as radio broadcasts, podcasts, and TV programs, present more realistic listening contexts than scripted dialogues. Research indicates that exposure to authentic materials improves comprehension by providing a variety of accents, speech rates, and real-life expressions that are often absent from traditional classroom materials (Gilmore, 2007). These materials encourage learners to confront the natural variability of spoken language, thus enhancing their listening adaptability and preparing them for real-

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LEMEFP-2024  
November 23

Aspect	Scientific Insights
	world communication (Vandergrift, 2007).
Listening and Affective Factors	Affective factors, such as motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence, have been shown to significantly affect L2 listening comprehension (MacIntyre et al., 1997). High anxiety can impair cognitive resources and hinder the ability to focus on the listening task (Horwitz, 2001). Conversely, motivation and positive self-efficacy correlate with better listening outcomes, as motivated learners tend to persist longer and engage more deeply with challenging listening tasks (Dörnyei, 2005). Understanding the role of affective factors allows for the creation of supportive learning environments that foster listening success.
Technology Integration in Listening	Technological tools, such as speech recognition software, interactive apps, and adaptive learning platforms, play an increasingly prominent role in listening instruction. These tools offer learners personalized practice, allowing them to engage with listening materials at their own pace and receive instant feedback on their performance (Chapelle, 2003). Studies have demonstrated that adaptive technologies can identify individual learner needs, offering customized content to enhance specific listening subskills (Stockwell, 2007). Moreover, multimodal platforms that integrate audio and visual components have been found to improve comprehension by providing multiple channels of information, thereby increasing retention (Graham, 2006).
Cross-Linguistic Influence	Cross-linguistic influence (CLI), which occurs when learners' first language (L1) affects their comprehension of L2 listening, has been a key area of study. Research suggests that phonological similarities or differences between L1 and L2 can impact how learners process speech, especially when dealing with speech sounds, intonation patterns, or grammar structures that differ from their L1 (Bialystok & Hakuta, 1999). Furthermore, learners who have stronger L1 listening skills tend to adapt more easily to L2 listening challenges, utilizing their L1-based strategies (Zhao, 2012). Understanding CLI helps in tailoring listening instruction to bridge the gap between L1 and L2.
Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST)	Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST) has been used to explore individual differences in listening comprehension. According to CDST, listening proficiency is influenced by multiple interacting factors, including cognitive resources, personal motivation, and affective variables (De Bot, Lowie, & Verspoor, 2007). Studies based on CDST have shown that non-linear development of listening skills results from the interaction of individual differences (e.g., working memory capacity, language aptitude) with external learning contexts. Research using this framework offers a more holistic view of listening comprehension development (Verspoor et al., 2011).
Long-Term Listening Skill Development	Longitudinal studies of listening comprehension show that skills develop gradually over extended periods of exposure and practice. Over time, learners gain better strategic awareness and automaticity in processing speech (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). These studies emphasize the importance of consistent, sustained practice and the role of feedback in improving listening skills. Furthermore, feedback loops in metacognitive cycles have been shown to strengthen listening fluency and comprehension accuracy (Goh, 2008).
Individual Differences in Listening	Individual differences in factors like self-efficacy, anxiety, and perfectionism influence how learners approach listening tasks and their subsequent performance (Razmi et al., 2017). Research using multicategorical mediation analysis has revealed complex relationships between these factors and L2 listening outcomes. For instance, learners with higher self-efficacy demonstrate greater persistence and motivation to overcome challenges in listening, while those with higher perfectionism may struggle with listening tasks due to fear of making mistakes (Vandergrift, 2007).

This scientifically enriched table integrates specific theories, research findings, and insights from various domains, such as cognitive psychology, linguistics, and

technology, into the understanding of L2 listening comprehension. We can put these concepts into four sub-categories which is given in table 5

1. Contributions of key scholars like Anderson [16], McLaughlin et al [18]., Bialystok [21], and Nagle and Sanders [22] have laid the foundation for the study of L2 listening comprehension. Their research has helped shape the understanding of how learners process listening in a second language, but over the last 20 years, there has been a shift in focus toward more dynamic, strategy-based approaches.

2. Shift to Strategy Training is which more recent research emphasized the role of strategy training in improving L2 listening comprehension. Strategy training helps learners use specific techniques to better understand spoken language. Research indicates that [23], [24], [25]:

- The frequency and type of strategies used by learners distinguish successful from unsuccessful learners.
- Learning strategies can be taught and refined.
- The application of strategies enhances language learning overall.
- According to Anderson, strategies used for language learning in listening do not differ significantly from general strategies applied in other areas such as reading or problem-solving.

3. The Metacognitive Approach:

The metacognitive approach to listening, particularly promoted by Vandergrift [3] and Mendelsohn [26], has been a significant development. Vandergrift introduced a metacognitive cycle in 2004, which encourages learners to:

- Plan how to approach listening tasks.
- Monitor their comprehension during the task.
- Evaluate their understanding after completing the task.
- This cycle helps learners reflect on their listening process, thereby improving comprehension and motivation. However, a limitation is that it may not apply effectively outside of the classroom, which led to revisions of the cycle in 2006 to integrate broader metacognitive activities and more extensive self-regulation of comprehension [27].

4. Psychological and Individual Differences. There is increasing interest in the role of psychological factors and individual differences in listening comprehension. The Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST), which emphasizes the variability of language learners and the interaction of various cognitive factors, is being applied to understand the complexities of L2 listening. Research by Razmi et al [28]. explores

how psychological traits, such as self-efficacy and perfectionism, influence listening comprehension. They found that learners' beliefs about their abilities and their personal tendencies can significantly impact their listening success. This research suggests that L2 listening comprehension is not just about cognitive processes but also about the individual's psychological profile.

**5. Challenges and Future Directions.** While metacognitive strategies have shown promise, their application outside the classroom remains challenging [26]. Goh has pointed out that strategies learned in a classroom setting may not be as effective when learners encounter real-world listening situations [27]. Future research should continue to explore how learners can use these strategies autonomously, particularly by considering individual differences such as motivation, cognitive styles, and personal experiences. Additionally, integrating psychological insights into listening comprehension training could open new pathways for more personalized and adaptive teaching strategies in L2 learning.

**6. Implications for L2 Listening Instruction.** The findings from this body of research suggest that effective L2 listening instruction should go beyond simply improving basic listening skills. It should involve strategy training, metacognitive awareness, and attention to the psychological and individual factors that contribute to a learner's ability to understand spoken language. Moreover, learner autonomy in using strategies and understanding their personal learning processes is key for success in listening comprehension. Educators should design listening activities that not only promote skill development but also encourage self-reflection and strategic use of cognitive resources. [29], [30], [31]

Table 5 Categories of Concepts

Category	Details
Contributions of Key Scholars	- Anderson, McLaughlin et al., Bialystok, and Nagle and Sanders contributed foundational work to L2 listening comprehension.
	- Over 20 years, focus has shifted toward <b>strategy-based approaches</b> to understanding and improving L2 listening comprehension.
Shift to Strategy Training	- <b>Strategy training</b> plays a key role in improving L2 listening comprehension.
	- Research highlights that <b>successful learners</b> use specific strategies, which can be <b>trained</b> and shown to <b>enhance</b> language learning.
	- <b>Anderson</b> argues that strategies in L2 listening are similar to those in other skills like reading and problem-solving.
The Metacognitive Approach	- The <b>metacognitive approach</b> , introduced by <b>Vandergrift</b> and <b>Mendelsohn</b> , emphasizes awareness of the listening process.
	- The <b>metacognitive cycle</b> encourages learners to plan, monitor, and evaluate their listening comprehension.
	- <b>2006 revision</b> expanded the cycle to include more metacognitive activities,

Category	Details
	helping learners regulate comprehension beyond the classroom.
<b>Psychological and Individual Differences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The <b>Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST)</b> is applied to understand how psychological factors influence L2 listening comprehension.</li> <li>- <b>Research by Razmi et al.</b> highlights how <b>self-efficacy</b> and <b>perfectionism</b> impact listening success, suggesting the importance of psychological traits in learning.</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges and Future Directions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A challenge remains in applying classroom-based strategies to real-world listening situations. <b>Goh</b> points out this limitation.</li> <li>- Future research should focus on <b>learner autonomy</b>, <b>individual differences</b>, and how learners can use strategies independently.</li> </ul>
<b>Implications for L2 Listening Instruction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- L2 listening instruction should integrate <b>strategy training</b>, <b>metacognitive awareness</b>, and address <b>psychological</b> and <b>individual factors</b>.</li> <li>- Activities should promote <b>self-reflection</b> and encourage <b>strategic use</b> of cognitive resources for greater learner autonomy in listening tasks.</li> </ul>

## Conclusion

The understanding of L2 listening comprehension has evolved to recognize the importance of active strategy use, metacognitive awareness, and individual learner differences. By integrating insights from cognitive psychology, sociocultural theory, and technological innovations, the field is moving toward more personalized, interactive, and adaptive approaches that aim to optimize listening proficiency. The growing focus on strategy training and metacognition underscores the importance of helping learners become autonomous in regulating their comprehension, thus fostering long-term success in L2 listening comprehension.

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