

# A study on asynchronous listening assignment



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Two views of listening have dominated listening instruction over the last twenty years: the bottom-up processing view and the top-down interpretation view. The bottom-up processing view supposes that listening is a process of decoding the sounds from the smallest meaningful units (phonemes) to complete texts.

The process is finished in a linear fashion: the phonemic units are decoded and linked together to form words, which in turn form phrases; phrases are linked together to form utterances, which sequentially form complete meaningful texts (Nana 1997). Meaning itself is obtained as the last step in the process. Bottom-up view emphasizes the discrimination of acoustic input, because it is the start of the linear decoding. General bottom-up strategies in listening include listening for specific details, recognizing cognates, recognizing word-order patterns, and etc. In contrast to the bottom-up processing view is the top-down interpretation view.

It suggests that listeners, employing incoming sounds as clues, actively construct or reconstruct the original meaning of the speaker by utilizing background knowledge of the topic. The expectations activated by the background knowledge could assist listeners' interpretation of what is heard and the prediction of what will come next (ibid). Top-down strategies take account of main idea comprehension, prediction, inference and so forth. Both bottom-up and top-down processes affect listening comprehension, therefore language learners need to be given opportunities to practice each of them.

Some domestic studies reveal that the Chinese college students have trouble in sound discrimination (Owing 2006; Ma 2007). In a pilot study, we discover

that none of the students are able to come up with relevant inference or proper summary after they listen to the English version of a film clip (from “The Sound of Music”), but 86% of them are successful in finishing the same tasks after the Chinese version is played. According to the students’ explanation, it results from the fast delivery of the English version, which prevents them from correct sound discrimination.

This indicates that efficient utilization of top-down strategies is based on sufficient bottom-up comprehension. Although bottom-up training had been popular in listening instruction before top-down strategy training as promoted, due to the underdevelopment of computer science at the time, it did little more than ten Introduction to phonetics Ana ten mechanical arils In pronunciation. Research on bottom-up training under the assistance of advanced technology has been rare.

To fill this gap, the present research attempts to make an empirical study on an instruction model, which emphasizes the fundamental importance of bottom-up training, and at the same time encourages the learners to obtain practical experience of top-down strategies through practice. The model is named Asynchronous Listening Instruction (AL’) by the authors. While the embryonic form of this teaching model was already in existence in the late 20th century (Professor IL Chunk from Human University used the similar model at that time), no research on it has been reported yet. . Asynchronous Listening Instruction 2. 1 Technique Support for ALL ALL is applicable to most multi-media assistant education systems so long as the configurations allow the students to record or to retrieve listening materials from the server, to call and seek individual communication with the instructor when they have <https://assignbuster.com/a-study-on-asynchronous-listening-assignment/>

problems, and as long as the system allows instructors to monitor each student's practice. An ideal system would permit the instructor to cut into a certain student's practice when the instructor finds it necessary.

Such a function operates like this: when the instructor cuts into a certain student's practice by pressing his/her seat number on the instructor's control platform, the student's listening material will automatically stop playing and he/she can only hear what the instructor is saying.

## 2. 2 ALL Instruction Processes

### 2. 2. 1 Preparation

Certain preliminary trainings on computer operation are necessary. Students should know how to copy or retrieve the listening materials from the server and how to play them. They should also know which button to press when they are in need of assistance.

It is advisable to explain to the students beforehand the teaching process and the focus of ALL. Materials introducing listening strategies (both bottom-up and top-down strategies) could be handed out as extracurricular reading materials. After the students get familiar with the multi-media system, the general teaching process of ALL could be carried out. It consists of four steps: 1) Pre-listening instruction 2) Learner-centered practice & instructor supervision/assistance 3) Task evaluation 4) Extracurricular follow-up practice

## 2. 2 Pre-listening Instruction

At the start of each class, listening tasks are assigned by the instructor and materials are recorded or retrieved from the server by the students. If the topic is alien to the students, background knowledge should be introduced.

### 2. 2. 3 Learner-centered Practice & Instructor Supervision / Assistance

Learner-centered practice is assisted and monitored by the instructor. Students will control their own

listening processes at the tempos that are suitable for them. They may stop at any point that hinders their comprehension and replay the part.

If the students fail to solve some problems on their own efforts, they are suggested to press the “ Call” button on their desks and seek the help from the instructor. Each student’s question is answered by the instructor through the microphone, without interfering with the other students’ practice. The monitoring system notifies the instructor to supervise each student’s listening process. We discover that, when in trouble, students of higher proficiency tend to actively seek help from the instructor while those of relatively low level prefer to be silent.

Consequently, by cutting into their listening with questions or suggestions, the instructor could offer more assistance to the low proficiency students. The instructor’s assistance is offered to the high proficiency and intermediate students only when they “ call in”. 2. 2. 4 Task Evaluation Before the end of the class, answers to the questions are checked and discussed. Common questions and difficult points are also tackled at this time. 2. 2. 5

Extracurricular Follow-up Practice In AL’, the students each would proceed with the proper speed according to their own listening competence.

Since the amount of assignment is made with the inconsideration of the high proficiency students, it is very likely that some intermediate students and the low proficiency students would be unable to finish all the tasks assigned in class. Thus the follow up exercises for them is necessary. With the help of the answers offered in class, the difficulty of the listening materials is

reduced, and the low proficiency students would not find the extracurricular work frustrating.

To guarantee the effective operation of AL', the following points are important: firstly, the Pre-listening instruction should last as short as possible in order to leave sufficient time for the students to do individual practice; secondly, the amount of the assignment is set in accordance with the ability of high proficiency students', therefore students of different levels could obtain sufficient practicing materials from the assignment; thirdly, for the sake of offering efficient assistance to the students, instructors should have a thorough understanding of the students and the teaching materials.

It is necessary for the instructors to know which students are in need of more supervision and assistance. Last but not least, discovering and correcting some students' bad habits in listening practice is also an important task. 3. Features of ALL in contrast to traditional listening instruction and self-access study In the traditional listening class, listening materials are played by the instructor for the whole class to practice together.

Thus, students of different levels interfere with each other because the class fails to cater to their respective needs. Even among the students with the same level of English proficiency, there exist diversified difficulties and problems. Nevertheless the students are provided with no time to tackle their own problems. In AL', although sitting in the same classroom, studying on the same materials at the same period of time, the students control their own listening processes and rivet the attention on their own difficult points.

It has been aforementioned that many English learners in China attribute failure in Listening to their poor sound discrimination, and accordingly students in ALL are suggested to work actively to discriminate the reduced forms as well as liaisons and to familiarize themselves with the intonation of English by replaying the difficult parts. Through this process, the students would acquaint themselves with the sounds of the engage forms that have caused them trouble. Even if they are not able to discriminate the sounds at the time, the acoustic sounds that have caused them trouble would leave them a deep impression.

After they get the answers either from tenet Instructor or Trot ten reticence KICK, teen would remember ten sounds. W they are confronted with these sounds again in the future, they could easily identify them. Furthermore, in AL', high proficiency and low proficiency students no longer hold down each other, because the former could proceed at " top speed", and the latter, as they could receive timely assistance from the instructor, are highly inspired and motivated. ALL is also different from self-access study.

Since self- access study guarantees students the total freedom of choice in practicing time and content, the students usually become disoriented: they have no idea about how much they have achieved and how much the others have learned, nor do they know clearly which materials are suitable for them. Therefore " blindness in material selection" and " random practice" are usually the results (Ghana & IL, 2002). In ALL model, however, all the students face the same tasks and are under the supervision of the instructor.

The high proficiency students, if they could finish the assignment within class, could have the extracurricular time fully at their own disposal; while the low proficiency students, if they fail to finish all the exercises in class, could finish the rest as the extracurricular follow-up exercises. In this way, all the students keep the same pace in general term and they would always know their position in the coordinates of the class.

#### 4. Empirical Study A

deductive research is adopted in this study to examine the effectiveness of ALL in contrast to the traditional listening instruction.

Deductive research is the process of reasoning, in which a conclusion follows necessarily from the stated premises. Deductive research is hypothesis-driven and its purpose is to testify the hypothesis and form a new theory. Thus deductive research is also called hypothesis-testing research (Lieu 2002).

#### 4. 1 Hypotheses

The hypotheses of the present research are: (1) Students subjectively accept AL'; (2) ALL is more effective than the traditional listening instruction in the FEEL context.

#### 4. 2 Subjects

The sample population in this study includes 130 non-English majors from Hogging Agricultural University.

The students are divided into two classes according to their majors. The two classes are randomly put into the control group and the experimental group, with 62 students in the experimental group and 68 in the control group. The two classes are taught by the same instructor.

#### 4. 3 Instruments

The instruments used in this research comprise of one questionnaire and two proficiency tests. The questionnaire is designed to elicit the students' evaluation on ALL in contrast to the traditional listening instruction. Five aspects about the teaching theologies are offered for evaluation.



The score for each item ranges from 1 to 10, with 10 the highest score for favorable evaluation. The first item is designed to check which instruction (ALL or the traditional listening instruction) offers more intensified practice. The second question measures which instruction stimulates more of the students' learning interest. The third entry determines students' feeling towards the physical environment for learning and teaching. The purpose of the fourth is to testify which instruction focuses more on the key-points of the listening trials and the difficult points for the students.

It is to check whether ALL is helpful to solve ten students' Uninomial problems . Nine last Item Is to totaled students' overall impression of ALL and the traditional listening instruction. Besides the questionnaire, the instruments also include one pretest and one posters. With the purpose of maintaining the internal validity of the experiment, both of the tests are derived from the listening part of the national College English Test Band 4 (CITE). It is a standardized nation-wide proficiency test for non-English majors.

Thus the pretest ND posters are almost at the same level of difficulty and in the same pattern. The total score of the listening test is twenty points. 4. 4 Data Collection and Analysis The research is carried out after the subjects have finished one term of traditional listening instruction in the university. At the beginning of the second term, the pretest is given to both of the experimental and control groups. During the second term, the experimental group is instructed by way of ALL while the control group maintains the traditional teaching methodology.

At the end of the term, the posters s given to both groups, and the experimental group is also required to complete the questionnaire, because they have experienced two different listening instruction models in the university: the traditional listening instruction and AL'. Four students are absent from class so 58 students from the experimental group complete the questionnaire.

#### 4. 4. 1 Pretests Comparison Between the Two Groups

An Independent-samples T test is applied to the pretests to see whether the control group and the experimental group are at the same level when the experiment starts.