An Empirical Study of Chinese EFL Learners’ Attention to Meaning and Form in the Course of Listening

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine Chinese EFL learners’ ability of simultaneously attending to meaning and form of language in the course of listening. The recall scores of the four groups performing different tasks while listening for meaning showed that while learners have difficulty in directing attention toward meaning and content, attending to the linguistic items of high communicative value or the items which are acoustically salient will not negatively affect comprehension. The findings suggest a combination of listening-to-comprehend with listening-to-learn in EFL teaching.

Key words: attention; listening; form; meaning

1. Introduction

A number of SLA researchers have argued that the processes involved in listening-to-comprehend and listening-to-learn are different. Nevertheless, as pointed out by Ellis (2003), such a claim is still controversial. Some SLA researchers, Krashen (1983, 1985), for example, regard comprehension as the constructive element in the process of learning a foreign language, while others argue that comprehensible input does not necessarily lead to L2 acquisition (Leow, 1997; Schmidt, 1990; Swain, 1995). In recent years, with more and more research into input processing, a general consensus has been reached that conscious attention is a mediating factor that greatly affects the process of acquisition (Sun, 2008).
However, due to the limited capacity to deal with stimuli (Broadbent, 1958; Kahneman, 1973; Wickens, 1984), it is difficult for learners to attend to both the content and the form of the incoming data simultaneously.

Wu pointed out that while learning English in a Chinese language environment is a rather daunting task (2001), the teaching of listening is even more frustrating. In addition to regular courses, learners have innumerable chances of exposure to aural input of the target language, such as radio, television, and so on. However, most learners have tried desperately to comprehend the listening material while missing the opportunity to incorporate the features of the aural input into their developing linguistic system. With a growing body of research focusing on form in L2 listening (Artegaga et al., 2003; DeJong, 2005; Leeser, 2004; Izumi, 2003; Richards, 2005), some Chinese researchers have recognized the role of listening as an aural input (Chen, 2005; Liu, 2002). Some even confirmed the importance of noticing in input processing (Yao, 2001; Zha, 2006), but studies on noticing allocation are sparse. Moreover, as Cao pointed out, around 81% of all the listening research was theoretical summarizing; only 19% was empirical study (Cao, 2006). Based on the above analysis, most research concerning the topic is descriptive in nature and some empirical studies should be conducted.

In the field of SLA, studies concerning listening have touched upon the improvement of comprehension, that is, listening-to-comprehend, while only a few have focused on listening-to-learn, with even fewer discussing the competition between form and meaning processing. In a Chinese context, such research is far from being adequate both quantitatively and qualitatively. Moreover, previous studies have often focused on the decoding process of aural input, while ignoring the effect that the learners’ first language might have on the input processing during listening. The present study was intended to update and expand upon the research done by VanPatten (1990), Berne (1989) and Wong (2001) by replicating one of VanPatten’s (1990) studies, which investigated learners’ abilities to simultaneously process meaning and form in oral input. In assigning learners to perform different tasks while listening for meaning, VanPatten found that learners have great difficulty in attending to meaning and form of the oral input concurrently. In an attempt to test the widely accepted “meaning-oriented” rule in input processing, it was hoped that the present study could validate findings in the previous studies in a totally different context.

2. Relevant Studies

Positing a limited capacity for dealing with incoming data encouraged some empirical studies on input processing. In one set of experiments involving think-aloud protocol, Mangubhai (1991) investigated the processing behavior of adult second language learners and its relationship to second language proficiency with the conclusion that a large proportion of the behavior learners engaged in to process the input was devoted to the extraction of meaning of utterances. He also found that some learners occasionally
devoted their attention to form. Yet, as he pointed out, such behavior tended to occur when meaning retrieval was more automatic (Mangubhai, 1991). With only five subjects, however, the study is no more than exploratory. The competitive relationship of form-meaning processing was also revealed in Gass’ study that investigated the effects of task repetition on linguistic output. The study indicated that attending to morph-syntactic form and attending to meaning are often in a competitive relationship (Gass et al., 1999).

If Mangubhai’s (1991) and Alvarea’s (1999) studies outlined the competitive relationship between meaning and form processing, VanPatten’s (1990) study has demonstrated this competition with a more concrete design and valid conclusions. In the study, 202 college level Spanish students in three levels were randomly assigned to perform one of the four tasks: 1) listening to the passage only; 2) listening to the passage and noting any and all occurrences of the content word “inflacion”; 3) listening to the passage and noting any and all occurrences of the definite article la; 4) listening to the passage and noting any and all occurrences of the verbal inflection -n. After listening, all participants were asked immediately to perform free written recalls in English, their first language. The results of the study supported two hypotheses by VanPatten (1990):

1. If learners have difficulty in directing attention toward both content and form, then a task involving conscious attention to non-communicative grammatico-morphological forms in the input will negatively affect comprehension of content.
2. If these same learners are (basically) going for meaning first, a task involving conscious attention to important lexical items will not affect comprehension of content (VanPatten, 1990: 287-301).

VanPatten (1990) has had a significant impact on investigating learners’ abilities to simultaneously process form and meaning in the input, and was thus replicated by many researchers. Berne (1989), for example, obtained the same results with different subjects and simplified listening material.

Another researcher, Bransdorfer (1991), by using attention tasks similar to VanPatten’s (1990) study, supported and expanded VanPatten’s findings. Similar to VanPatten, Bransdorfer (1991) found that attending to a lexical item of high communicative value (examen “examines”) while listening for content did not negatively affect comprehension, but attending to a form of low communicative value resulted in a drop in comprehension. However, Bransdorfer (1991) also argued that communicative value alone does not necessarily guide learners in input processing and other factors, such as acoustic salience may interact with communicative value.

Although the findings in the above mentioned studies are consistent in one way or another, their validity could be questioned because all the participants in the previous studies shared similar language background and the same L2. That was, they were all English-speaking students majoring in Spanish. Due to this consideration, Wong (2001) replicated the study by including the written mode and using a different L2, English, as a
foreign language. In Wong’s (2001) study, six tasks were employed as follows: 1) listening to the passage for content only, 2) listening for content while attending to the content word inflation, 3) listening for content while attending to the definite article the, 4) reading the passage for content only, 5) reading the passage for content while attending to the content word inflation, 6) reading the passage for content while attending to the definite article the. Only task results in the aural mode mirrored those of VanPatten’s original study. This indicated that modality is a variable that influences how learners process input (Wong, 2001).

Although VanPatten’s (1990) study and its replications of it enriched our understanding of conscious input processing, it should be noted that in the original VanPatten (1990) study and in berne’s (1989) and Wong’s (2000) replication, the lexical items inflacion and inflation are cognates with regard to the participants’ L1 and L2. In Bransdorfer’s (1991) study, the item of high communicative value, examenes, is also a cognate of the English word exams. Thus, it may be possible that participants found it easier to pay attention to meaning and to a content lexical item because the lexical item was a cognate rather than because it was an item of high communicative value. To test the effects of communicative value on input processing more adequately, studies should be conducted in an EFL context in which the target items are not cognates with respect to the participants’ L1 and L2. In addition, the findings of the previous studies were based more on quantitative data. Some qualitative data which could provide detailed explanations for the quantitative data should be included in the study.

The present study intended to replicate VanPatten’s (1990) study in an effort not only to test VanPatten’s findings in a Chinese context, but also explore the possibility of focusing on form in listening teaching (Richards, 2005). The two specific research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

1. Is there any significant difference between scores on the task of listening for content only and the tasks of listening for content plus a linguistic item?
2. Is there any significant difference between scores on the three tasks of listening for content while attending to different linguistic items?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants
One hundred fifty second-year English majors from four intact classes in Yili Normal University participated in the study. The participants ranged from 18 to 20 in age. Most participants’ L1 was Chinese, and 8 participants’ L1 was either Kazakh or Uyghur. Based on the criteria used in VanPatten’s (1990) original study, the participants were required to detect a minimum of 60% of the target items—the key lexical word gun(s), the definite article the, and the verb morpheme -ed. There were a total of 11 tokens of each item. Therefore, those who took down less than six marks were excluded from data analysis. Then, among the remaining participants, those who did extremely poor or extraordinary
well in their recalls were excluded from data analysis in order to cancel out and neutralize the intervening effects such as Hawthorne effects, resulting in a total of 89 participants for the present study.

According to the listening scores of the previous semester, the overall proficiency of the four classes was the same. Table 1 presents the scores of the final listening exam at the end of the semester before data collection. The mean scores for the four classes ranged from 85.3 to 86.41.

| Table 1. Participants’ scores of the final listening exam before data collection |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Task | N   | Minimum | Maximum | Mean   | Std. Deviation |
| CT   | 22  | 67.00    | 98.00    | 86.4091 | 8.83531        |
| CG   | 23  | 72.00    | 98.00    | 86.2609 | 6.70968        |
| CE   | 21  | 71.00    | 96.00    | 85.4762 | 7.19457        |
| C    | 23  | 68.00    | 98.00    | 85.3043 | 8.41230        |

C = listening to the passage for content only; CE = listening for content while attending to the verb morpheme -ed; CG = listening for content while attending to the key lexical word gun(s); CT = listening for content while attending to the definite article the.

3.2 Instrument

The instrument used in the listening test was a recall test. The test consisted of a 207-word narrative passage titled “Gun-slinging in America” (See Appendix), which was modified to ensure the equal occurrences and scattering of the target items in the passage, the key lexical word gun(s), the definite article the and the verb morpheme -ed. The passage was read by a native speaker of English and recorded using an MP3 recorder. Like VanPatten (1990), the passage was not read at a normal rate and the speaker paused briefly at clause boundaries and other breath group boundaries to allow for processing time on part of the participants.

3.3 Data collection

The four classes took the test during evening classes under the supervision of the first researcher and three other teachers. Before listening, the participants were given a brief introduction of the key words in the title of the listening passage, and this was to activate the their background knowledge. During listening, the four classes were randomly assigned to one of the following four tasks:

1. Task C: listening to the passage for content only
2. Task CE: listening for content while attending to the verb morpheme -ed
3. Task CG: listening for content while attending to the key lexical word gun(s)
4. Task CT: listening for content while attending to the definite article the

Attention to a specific form was operationalized by requiring participants to put whatever mark they like on a piece of paper every time they heard the target item in the passage. After listening, all participants had 10 minutes to write down everything they
could remember from the passage in Chinese and then they were asked to hand in both the recall and the paper of marks.

3.4 Data analysis
Recall protocols were scored according to the number of idea units recalled. Following VanPatten (1990), the division of the 48 idea units of the current study was roughly based on Carrell’s (1985) definition which combines the semantic and syntactic features of the language. In his definition, Carrell (1985) claimed that:

Each unit consists of a single clause main or subordinate, including adverbial and relative clauses. Each infinitive construction, gerundive, nominalized verb phrase, and conjunct was also identified as a separate idea unit. In addition, optional and/or heavy prepositional phrases were also designated as separate idea units. (Carrell, 1985: 737)

All the written recalls were scored by the first researcher using a blind scoring procedure. Since the original passage had been divided into the smallest units both semantically and syntactically, the participants could get one point for each correct idea unit. No situation for 0.5 points was taken into account. It should be noted that the arrangement of the idea units was also ignored. That is to say, as long as the idea unit was correct, the participant would get one point wherever he or she located it. To some extent, the difference in translation was also ignored.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Differences between the task of listening for content only and the other tasks
As is shown in Table 2, the mean of the recalls of Task CG was the highest among the four groups (6.04), followed by Task CT (5.64) and C (5.61), and the average mean of Task CE was the lowest (3.90). This means that during the first listening the participants who listened for content plus the key lexical item gun(s) produced the highest recall scores while those who listened for content and the verb morpheme -ed obtained the lowest recall scores, and with those in Task CT and Task C in between.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CE</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>3.9048</td>
<td>1.84132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>5.6087</td>
<td>1.82755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>5.6364</td>
<td>2.27921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CG</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>6.0435</td>
<td>2.09931</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To determine whether there was a significant difference between the recall scores of the four tasks, a multiple comparison of Tukey’s HSD for ANOVA was performed on the data. Table 3 shows that there were significant differences between Tasks CE and C ($p = 0.032$), but no such difference was found between scores on Tasks C and CG ($p = 0.60$), C and CT ($p = 1.00$). That is, the scores on Task C varied with scores on Task CE significantly, but none of such difference existed between Tasks C and CG or between Tasks C and CT.

### Table 3. Significance levels between Task C and the other three tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(I) TASK</th>
<th>(J) TASK</th>
<th>Mean Difference (I-J)</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lower Bound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>CE</td>
<td>1.70393 (*)</td>
<td>.61012</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>.1050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>CG</td>
<td>-.43478</td>
<td>.59610</td>
<td>.885</td>
<td>-1.9969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>CT</td>
<td>-.02767</td>
<td>.60283</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-1.6074</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

#### 4.1.1 Difference between Tasks C and CE

The result in significant differences between the Tasks C and CE was consistent with that in VanPatten’s (1990) findings, and also corresponded with the findings by Berne (1991), Bransdorfer (1991) and Wong (Wong, 2001). The consistency validated the difficulty in simultaneously attending to form and meaning of incoming data. The interpretation for this was that attention requires a lot of effort and that humans have a limited capacity to deal with stimuli. This has been proven by many researchers (Kahneman, 1973; Wickens, 1984).

#### 4.1.2 Difference between Tasks C and CG

The result that there was no significant difference between scores on Task CG and C corresponded to the results of VanPatten’s (1990). The best explanation for the result came from VanPatten (1985), who postulated that the communicatively loaded items in input receive conscious attention from early stage learners and become available as intake for the developing language system. Though the requirement of attending to the key lexical word gun(s) in Task CG might interfere with comprehension, it did not conflict with meaning processing completely. The result was also congruent with the idea that content lexical items are of primary importance during second language input processing. As VanPatten (2000) pointed out:

> If comprehension was effortful for beginning and intermediate learners, it seemed logical that their attentional resources would be directed toward the detection of content words to help them grasp the meaning of an utterance. (VanPatten, 2000: 19)

This argument for the primacy of lexical items was validated by Mangubhai (1991), who
found that all learners focused on lexical words to a greater or lesser degree in order to get meaning from TPR input.

4.1.3 Difference between Tasks C and CT
Table 3 also shows that there was no significant difference between scores on Task C and CT \( (P = 1.0) \). The result conflicts with that of VanPatten’s (1990). In his study, significant difference was found between the two tasks. The result could be interpreted as follows. First of all, the morphological property of the definite article might not posit much difficulty for the participants to notice. Although the is a grammatico-morphological form with little referential meaning, it is closer to being word-like. It could be that the participants preferred to attend to the isolated words due to their first language transfer.

Second, the teaching and learning tradition in Chinese EFL classes might make it less difficult to perform Task CT. Since the is absent in the Chinese language, both teachers and learners have great difficulty in dealing with it. That is why both teachers and students might devote more attention to it and become more sensitive to the presence of the item the. This habitual noticing allocation pattern in learning makes it easier for listeners to identify the target item the from speech. As explained by Wong (2001), the reason could be that the participants in Task CT may have performed their task in a purer sense of what they were expected to do than those in Task C (Wong, 2001).

Third, the relatively higher degree of proficiency of participants in Task CT might benefit them in their performance. According to Table 1, the means of participants in Task CT (86.41) ranked the highest of all the participants before the test, while the means of those in Task C was the lowest (85.3). The difference in the level of proficiency might affect the participants’ performance to some extent.

4.2 Differences between tasks of listening for content and a linguistic item

Table 4. Significance levels between tasks CE, CG and CT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(I) TASK</th>
<th>(J) TASK</th>
<th>Mean Difference (I-J)</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CE</td>
<td>CG</td>
<td>-2.13872(*)</td>
<td>.61012</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>-3.7376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CT</td>
<td>-1.73160(*)</td>
<td>.61671</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td>-3.3477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CG</td>
<td>CE</td>
<td>2.13872(*)</td>
<td>.61012</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.5398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CT</td>
<td>.40711</td>
<td>.60283</td>
<td>.906</td>
<td>-1.1727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td>CE</td>
<td>1.73160(*)</td>
<td>.61671</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td>.1155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CG</td>
<td>-.40711</td>
<td>.60283</td>
<td>.906</td>
<td>-1.9869</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows that there was significant difference between Tasks CE and CG \( (p=0.004) \) and between Tasks CE and CT \( (p = 0.031) \), but no such difference was found between Task CG and CT \( (p = 0.906) \). That is, the scores on Task CE varied with scores of the other two
tasks significantly, but none of such difference existed between scores on Task CG and CT. It means that among the three tasks, the task that requires participants to attend to the verb morpheme \(-ed\) while listening for meaning posed more difficulty for the participants than the other two tasks. In contrast, no such difference was found between the content plus the key lexical word recalls and content plus the recalls.

4.2.1 Difference between Tasks CE and CG
The result that there was significant difference between Task CE and CG indicated that the participants who were required to note down the verb inflection morpheme \(-ed\) while listening for content had encountered more difficulty than those who listened for content plus the key lexical item gun(s).

In consistence with that in VanPatten’s (1990) study, and also corresponding with that in Berne (1991), Bransdorfer (1991) and Wong (2001), the result could be interpreted as follows. One interpretation was centered on communicative value. The significantly lower scores on Task CE indicated that attending to the verb-ending \(-ed\) while listening to the passage affected comprehension much more than attending to the key lexical words gun(s). According to VanPatten (1985, 2000), forms with communicative value were easier to be attended to and in Task CG, gun(s) was the content word with high communicative value. So extracting the target item from utterances did not exclusively conflict with attending to meaning. In contrast, verb inflection belongs to the category of low communicative value and in the normal practice of listening, whether or not the verb morpheme could be noticed did not hamper comprehension. Thus verb endings are easily ignored during listening.

Another explanation could be based on the different perceptual and acoustic salience of the target items in the two tasks. In Task CE, the additional task for participants to perform was to note down the \(-ed\) morpheme whenever they heard it. As \(-ed\) was a bound morpheme with little referential meaning, it was usually pronounced softly and quickly. This increased the difficulty in perception. If participants wanted to hear it, they had to be more attentive to the item and hence most of their attention was devoted to noticing the item on the expense of comprehending meaning. However this was not the same as in Task CG. Since gun(s) was an important lexical item, it was always stressed and pronounced clearly, which in turn made it easier for participants to detect.

4.2.2 Difference between Task CE and CT
Table 4 also demonstrated the significant difference between participants listening for content plus the verb ending \(-ed\) and content plus definite article the. This result contradicts the major findings in VanPatten’s (1990) study, but was consistent with the findings exhibited in higher level subjects in the same study. In regards to proficiency level, VanPatten found no difference for low level subjects in attending to bound (Task CE) and free morphemes (Task CT). However, high level subjects did exhibit a difference.

Given the overall lack of communicative value of the target items in the two tasks,
something other than communicative value was at work. One interpretation might result from the phonological properties of the two linguistic items. Though both the and -ed were non-communicative grammatico-morphological items, the former was free but the latter was bound. Due to the first language transfer, students tended to identify the syllables of individual words in utterances as a whole. So it would be easier to identify the than -ed. In this respect, the interpretation echoed Bransdorfer’s (1991) finding that “items with low communicative value that are acoustically salient may be more easily processed than items of low communicative value that are not acoustically salient” (Bransdorfer, 1991: 138).

Similarly, different morphological properties could also account for the result. Considering that learners are initially driven to process content words before anything else, they prefer processing lexical items to grammatical items for semantic information. As mentioned earlier, since the is a free lexical item while -ed is bound, it would be relatively easier for participants in Task CT to detect the target item the than those in Task CE to detect the target item -ed. Then, the task involving noting down -ed consumed more attentional capacity in processing input, resulting in a significant drop in comprehension.

Another alternative interpretation might stem from the linguistic property of the two items, which was based on cue validity under the framework of the Competition Model (Bates & MacWhinney, 1989: 77-117). According to VanPatten (2000), cue validity refers to the degree to which a cue helps a comprehender in making correct interpretations during on-line sentence comprehension (VanPatten, 2000: 51-52). In the present study, the cues for the participants to perform their tasks varied with the task they performed. In Task CT, the cue that would help participants might be nouns, as the is usually attached to nouns, especially countable nouns. As nouns always take stress in sentences, the detection of nouns could profit that of the. On the other hand, -ed was a verb morpheme which appears at the end of verbs. Though most verbs are stressed, not all verb’s past tense forms end with -ed, and -ed would not be the sole conveyor of the semantic notion “in the past”. In this case, a verb might function as interference rather than a clue to detect -ed as it increased the confusion of distinguishing regular verbs from the irregular ones. This speculation was best supported by the question raised by one of the participants. When required to note down -ed during listening for content, he asked, “Shall I attend to items like ‘was, were, went or bought’?” The question indicated that participants unconsciously equate -ed with all the past forms of all verbs. Thus the interference of the irregular verbs increased the difficulty in identifying -ed.

A fourth interpretation could be based on Clarke’s “language competence ceiling” (Clarke, 1979: 121-150). As is shown in Table 1, the listening proficiency of the participants in Task CT before the test was the highest among all the participants. However minor the difference was, its beneficial effects on the participants’ performance could not be denied.

The above findings, somewhat out of our expectation, mirrored the result on Level III subjects in VanPatten’s (1990) study and supported Bransdorfer’s (1991) conclusion that communicative value may interact with acoustic salience in input processing.
4.2.3 Difference between Task CT and CG

Table 4 shows there was no significant difference between scores on Task CT and CG. This result contradicts that of VanPatten’s (1990) original study, but was consistent with the findings in Bransdorfer’s (1991) study. The acoustic salience of *the* might explain the result. In spite of being a grammatico-morphological forms of little referential meaning, *the* could stand alone. This property contributed to the salience of *the* since it is easy to detach an isolated word in speech. Comments from one of the participants revealed the importance of such salience:

> To range the difficulty, *gun(s)* is the easiest one, followed by *the*, with *-ed* to be the most difficult one. The reason I say so is that *gun(s)* is an important word and usually stressed. In comparison, *the* is not pronounced as strongly as *gun*, but, after all, it is a word. (Cui, from Task CT, Translated)

Additionally, the relatively higher level of proficiency of the participants in Task CT might have helped them with their performance. Due to their comparatively higher proficiency, the participants in Task CG and CT might not have encountered the same level of difficulty in performing the task.

5. Conclusion

Learners have difficulty in attending to both meaning and form in aural input. The condition for meaning-form processing should be based on the communicative value and the acoustic saliency of the linguistic items they attend to. Learners’ proficiency levels would interfere in the processing as well.

The findings of the present study suggest some implications for teaching EFL listening in China. In normal listening teaching, both teachers and students spend most of their time and energy on comprehending the meaning. The constructive role of aural input in SLA is not fully recognized. The processes of listening-to-comprehend and listening-to-learn are somewhat separated into two parts. The findings that attending to the key lexical word did not negatively affect comprehension indicate the possibility of improving learners’ vocabulary learning through listening teaching. The results that the recall scores of those who attended to *the* was not significantly lower compared with content only recalls and content plus lexically focused listening indicated that it is possible to draw students’ attention to the form of the language during listening. Based on Noticing Hypothesis, such attention may facilitate the acquisition of certain linguistic features and hence bridge the gap between listening-to-comprehend and listening-to-learn. Moreover, as repetition is a normal practice adopted in listening teaching, it is more likely that certain linguistic features could be acquired through repeated listening in the process of comprehension.
In all, given that it is possible to attend to certain linguistic features of the aural input without impeding comprehension of content, the present study paves the way for future listening instruction, profiling the possibility of unifying the processes of listening-to-learn and listening-to-comprehend.

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**Appendix Sample passage**

**Gun-slinging in America**

Gun ownership is a social problem in the United States. Sam Walker happened not to be an average American gun owner, for he had no interest in guns at all. The average gun owner owns at least three guns, but Walker had only one gun, which his friends persuaded him to buy for the sole purpose of protecting himself and his family in their suburban home. Walker was even not interested in guns. He still didn’t know much about the gun when his burglar alarm went off one weekday morning last December. The security company notified him of a break-in. Walker rushed home from work, quietly entered the house, took his gun off from where he had left it for
safekeeping, and, hearing a noise, went steadily up the stairs and opened a closet door. He saw a
movement, a figure, and in a split second fired. The gun worked perfectly, and Walker’s aim was
ture. A body fell to the floor. It was his 16-year-old daughter. She had skipped school that day and
hidden in the closet to avoid her father. The gun which her father bought to protect them killed her.
So does a gun make you safer or increase your likelihood of violent death?

(Copy editing: Anthony Zak)