Listening in English as a foreign language: a multiple case study of teachers' and learners' practices and beliefs in an Italian secondary school

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Abstract

This thesis explores the beliefs and practices related to listening in English as a Foreign language of English language teachers and learners in an Italian upper secondary school. While studies on teacher and learner beliefs on various aspects of English language teaching and learning have been conducted, there is a paucity of studies investigating listening, especially in secondary schools, and no study to date in the Italian context.

Drawing on the fields of teacher cognition, learner beliefs and listening pedagogy, this research is a multiple case study of four experienced teachers and four groups of learners (84 in total). Data were collected during an academic year through classroom observations, teacher interviews (including video-stimulated recall interviews), learner questionnaires, learner interviews and document analysis.

Findings show that teachers thought of listening not as an end in itself, but as part of a broader educational approach. As such, listening was subservient to other purposes, such as learning vocabulary or developing critical thinking, and there was little evidence of focusing on developing the processes of listening. Teaching approaches varied from highly structured and coursebook-based to more emergent, content-driven teaching, showing the high degree of freedom of teachers in Italian schools. In explaining their practices, teachers articulated their beliefs about education, contextual factors, learners and listening. Tensions between these beliefs emerged, highlighting the existence of core and peripheral beliefs. Learners generally showed positive beliefs about listening, which were highly influenced by the different tasks they experienced in the classroom. A common theme emerging among learners was also that listening was perceived as a highly unpredictable activity. Teachers and learners also interpreted and misinterpreted each other's beliefs, practices and emotions. These interpretations, as well as the teachers' and learners' beliefs and practices, are discussed in terms of their implications for pedagogy and teacher education.

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CA	Comprehension Approach
CLIL	Content and Language Integrated Learning
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
FC	Flipped Classroom
FCE	First Certificate of English
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
TALIS	Teaching and Learning International Survey
VSR	Video-stimulated recall

Chapter 1 Introduction

The present study investigates listening in English in a foreign language in an Italian secondary school. It focuses on the beliefs held by four experienced teachers and 84 learners, as well as their practices related to teaching and learning listening. To gain a deep understanding of these issues, the study uses classroom observation, learner surveys, interviews with teachers and students and the analysis of documents such as syllabi and classroom materials.

My interest in this topic originated from my practice as an English language teacher, my experiences as a language student in Italian schools and my MA research. I researched listening during my MA TESOL and became aware of how users of English as a foreign language develop their listening and the difficulties that they encounter. Further, I learned that listening instruction often focuses on the product of listening in the form of answers to comprehension questions, rather than developing the processes needed to enhance listening skill.

After my MA, I taught English in Spain and Italy for a few years. Throughout this time, my teaching and networking experiences led me back to a recurrent question: why do students not understand spoken English? When participating in professional development activities, I also realised how listening was something that was either not given much thought at all, or it was believed that simple repeated exposure to oral input sufficed for listening development. At this point, plans were being set in motion in Italy to reform the school system and introduce national standardised tests of English for secondary schools, testing reading and, crucially, listening, causing controversy in public discourse and among teachers. Having previously studied in the Italian system and worked with secondary school teachers for my MA research, I became interested in learning how listening was being taught and the reasons behind this, as well as learners' experiences. That this research was needed became apparent to me when I started reading more about the topic and found a paucity of research on listening compared to the other three macro-skills; crucially, however, this was especially true in the Italian context, where classroom-based language teaching research is lacking, and in secondary school settings more broadly. Eventually, I decided to conduct research in schools to find out how listening was being taught and learned and how this could inform key stakeholders at a time of policy change.

1.1 Aims of the study

The study draws on three sub-fields of the language education literature: language teacher cognition, language learner beliefs and listening pedagogy. As I mentioned, my interest was sparked by the question of why learners struggle to understand oral English. This is a well-known issue in language education and one that has been connected to a teaching approach that tests listening: guided by materials, standardised exams and little access to viable alternatives, teachers are believed to follow a product-oriented approach, whereby they ask students to listen and answer comprehension questions, but seldom work on *how* to develop the processes needed for successful oral comprehension.

In spite of how widely held this view is, surprisingly little empirical evidence exists showing how listening is actually taught in classrooms. It is clear that listening can be a considerable obstacle for many learners of English as a foreign language, but what is less clear is how listening is taught and what reasons underlie these teaching approaches. In my attempt to address this question, I turned to research in language teacher cognition. This field, investigating teachers' work and their emotional and mental lives, provided valuable insights into the complexity of the beliefs, knowledge and emotions that motivate what teachers do.

Having identified language teacher cognition as a field to study teachers' work, I also realised that little research existed that simultaneously investigated teachers and learners in the same study, and even less that researched possible relationships between these two dimensions. Consequently, I drew on the language learner belief literature, which has shown how the beliefs held by students can influence their learning.

In light of all of the above, and of my personal professional motivation for situating the study in Italian schools, I set out to investigate the following:

- How listening was taught and how teachers explained their approach;
- How listening was learned and what beliefs learners held about their learning,
- What relationships existed between the teachers' practices and explanations of them (including their beliefs) and the learners' beliefs and practices.

In my analysis of the teachers' explanations for how they taught listening, I did not limit myself to eliciting their beliefs, but also accounted for contextual factors, such as examinations and teaching materials, which have been shown

to exert an important influence on what teachers believe and do in previous studies.

As I explain in the Methodology chapter, I adopted a constructivist, interpretive paradigm and a multiple case study approach to investigate the issue from multiple perspectives. I did so by collecting in-depth data and engaging with the field for a prolonged period of time, a full academic year. Teachers' and learners' views were elicited through interviews, most of which were based on previous classes that I had observed and recorded, to ensure our discussions were not overly abstract in nature. Further, I triangulated this evidence with a learner survey, to gauge the issues of importance to most learners and trends emerging across the sample of learners, and the analysis of documents (e.g. syllabi and listening tests).

1.2 Overview of chapters

This thesis comprises of thirteen chapters. Chapters 1-4 outline the context and rationale for the study, situating it within the literature and justifying my methodological choices. Chapters 5-9 present the findings from each of the four cases and a cross-case analysis. Chapters 10-11 offer a discussion of the findings with reference to existing research, and their implications for practice and further research.

Chapter 2 discusses the context of this research, including the Italian school and teacher education system, the role of foreign languages in society and English language education in schools.

Chapter 3 defines the theoretical orientation of this work by situating it within the existing literature in the fields of listening instruction, language teacher cognition and language learner beliefs. I also review where these fields overlap and how the present study addresses gaps in the literature.

Chapter 4 introduces the research questions and outlines the ontology and epistemology of the research and its case study approach. Further, it discusses the sampling and ethical issues encountered and provides a discussion of the data collection instruments used, with their strengths and limitations. Finally, the chapter discusses the data analysis procedures and measures taken to enhance the trustworthiness of the research.

Chapter 5-8 present the findings from the four cases. Each chapter includes three sections: teacher data (teacher profile, key features of listening instruction and teacher's explanations), learner data (reported listening practices and beliefs) and teacher-learner relationships (convergence, divergence and mutual

influence). The results are presented with extensive reference to excerpts from classroom observations, interview transcripts and survey responses.

Chapter 9 summarises the key features of the four cases and compares the main findings related to practices and beliefs across the cases.

Chapter 10 discusses the contributions of the research to existing knowledge about listening in relation to teachers' and learners' beliefs and practices and the limitations of the study.

Chapter 11 concludes the thesis by summarising its key insights, examining its implications for teaching practice and teacher education, and making recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2 Context

The aim of this chapter is to situate the study in its context and discuss my rationale for conducting this research and choosing this specific context. I provide a brief examination of the Italian school system, with specific reference to foreign language and English language education and how this is implemented at school level. I then focus on the school in which the study took place and conclude by stating my motivation for choosing this specific context of study. Throughout the chapter, when research available on some specific sub-topics is limited, I refer to international surveys such as the PISA and TALIS reports by OECD, to my personal knowledge and experience in the context and to common knowledge among Italian teachers.

2.1 Organisation of the education system

Italians receive free and compulsory education for ten years at least, from six to sixteen years of age (MIUR, 2007). The system is organised in three cycles, including five years of primary (five to ten years of age), three years of lower secondary (ten to thirteen) and five years of upper secondary school (fourteen to nineteen). In each education cycle, students are grouped in classes of 20 to 30 students for the whole duration of the cycle. The groups are organised based on age and students are not streamed by ability, making mixed-level classes a common issue in schools.

Learners aged 14 to 19 can choose between different types of upper secondary schools: *licei* (with a primarily theoretical orientation as a prelude to higher-level studies), *istituti tecnici* ("technical institutes", providing background in the economic and professional sectors), and *istituti professionali*, that is, vocational schools (European Commission, 2014). *Licei,* the type of school in which this research is situated, are further divided into different sub-types based on their key subjects. Based on (non-binding) advice from lower secondary school teachers, pupils can choose to enrol in a *liceo scientifico*, focusing on scientific subjects, a *liceo classico,* focusing on literature, and Ancient Latin and Greek or a *liceo linguistico*, focusing on Modern Foreign Languages. Other *liceo* types exist, but they are beyond the scope of this study as they were not represented in the sample of student participants. Although all *licei* share some fixed common subjects, such as Italian language and literature, Maths and Philosophy, each *liceo* type offers a higher emphasis on science, classics or languages respectively and can set their school curricula with a certain degree of freedom.

2.2 Foreign languages in Italy

It is not uncommon for Italians to be characterised as having poor foreign language skills. Although no recent data on actual competence are available, a 2012 survey showed that only 34% of Italians perceived their competence as sufficient to have a conversation in English (European Commission, 2012). This situation is generally ascribed to the translation and dubbing of most international books and films having made foreign languages less of a perceived necessity (Lopriore, 2002) and decreased the chances for informal language acquisition (British Council, 2018). Further, the high Italian illiteracy rates until the mid-1960s and wide use of dialects have historically led to a higher emphasis on teaching the national language rather than foreign languages (Pulcini, 1997).

Education has arguably also played a role in determining this reported lack of competence. As we will see, language teacher education is provided in a fragmented manner; further, language teaching is also reportedly based largely on explicit grammar teaching, reading and writing. Although classroom-based evidence on this is scarce, Faez's (2011) findings from interviews and questionnaires with twenty-nine Italian teachers show that teachers are concerned about the excessive focus on grammar and accuracy in teaching in schools. Serraggiotto's (2012) survey analysis of 353 recent high school graduates also reveals that grammar and writing are the two aspects most frequently covered in English classes according to students. In spite of this, it is also worth noting that language proficiency appears to be higher in the young and university-educated population, and it has become common for adolescents to use English as a language of "socialisation", appropriated and co-constructed with peers (Giorgis, 2013). Arguably, this picture of Italians as "bad at languages" may at least partially be due to the lack of research on younger populations, which is something this research begins to address.

In terms of foreign language education, Italy's policies have evolved in the past few decades in parallel with recommendations from the European Union. By the mid-1990s, "mother-tongue plus two foreign languages" had become a key phrase in the EU linguistic policy (Leone, 2015). This resulted in the implementation of the *Progetto Lingue* in Italy in 1999 (an experimental project in schools focusing on Communicative Language Teaching) and the introduction of the study of two foreign languages in lower secondary schools (Balboni et al., 2017). The six levels (A1 to C2) defined in the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2001) were adopted on a national level in the same year. This disrupted the Italian foreign language

teaching culture, which, according to Lopriore (2002), struggled to adapt to the concept of language "competences" and work towards can-do statements.

With English being virtually mandatory for the whole duration of compulsory education, these provisions have made Italy one of the EU countries with the highest number of years of compulsory foreign language education (13 years) and highest number of hours devoted to foreign language study (with a peak of 194 recommended hours per year in *licei*) (European Commission et al., 2017). Indeed, foreign languages (and crucially, English) are perceived by parents as important: in the 2018 PISA survey, three quarters of Italian parents reported considering whether a school had a focus on foreign languages as one of four main criteria for choosing it for their children (OECD, 2018).

In the past decade, the 2008 economic crisis has had a major impact of the conception of foreign languages in the EU, with the publication of a number of resolutions linking foreign language competence to economic growth and employability (Mezzadri, 2016; Leone, 2015). In Italy, a country still afflicted by high unemployment, these recommendations prompted a process of modernisation in foreign language education policy. In 2010, the Ministry of Education defined B1 as the target achievement level for the first two years of upper secondary school and B2 for the end of upper secondary school (MIUR, 2010a). Furthermore, it introduced the teaching of at least one non-linguistic subject with Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodology in the last year of upper secondary school (Saccardo, 2016). In most cases, the language chosen to teach these non-linguistic subjects is English. Despite these attempts to improve foreign language education, a number of challenges in the system are still to be addressed, especially with regards to teacher recruitment and education.

2.3 Teacher education

Until 1999, the route into language teaching in Italy was for teachers to gain a Master's Degree in Foreign Languages and Literature and subsequently sit a national exam, as all the teacher participants in this research did. Sitting this national exam was the only way to secure tenured positions, i.e. permanent contracts with state schools. The pre-service education system has changed several times since 1999, with various attempts to introduce pre-service programmes encompassing pedagogical training and a practicum in schools. Nevertheless, language teachers have always had to be graduates of Languages and Literature programmes, which are characterised by a theoretical orientation, a strong focus on literature and limited provision for language teaching methodology modules. Indeed, the prevalence of literature

training over pedagogy is one of the few aspects that never fundamentally changed in the Italian system (although teaching methodology modules in universities have recently increased in number), creating generations of language teachers with a strong literary background, but arguably more limited knowledge of teaching methodology (Santipolo, 2017).

As far as in-service education is concerned, in order to tackle the low participation of teachers in professional development, a 2015 reform introduced a dedicated CPD budget (Schleicher, 2020). Tenured teachers, who are approximately three quarters of the total school teachers in Italy (Ciccarelli, 2020), are entitled to an individual yearly voucher of 500 Euros for in-service professional development. Nevertheless, since they are rarely asked to report whether they spend it to attend training events or buy equipment, it is difficult to monitor their access to in-service teaching training, and it is argued that they spend a relatively large portion of it on technological devices (British Council, 2018). Furthermore, difficulties may arise in locating training opportunities that are relevant to teachers' needs: for instance, a search on the national database of CPD opportunities for tenured school teachers currently finds no courses covering oral skills in language teaching (MIUR, 2020b).

This lack of structured pre- and in-service training is also reflected in the latest international TALIS survey of teachers in OECD countries, which found that only 64% of Italian lower secondary teachers received pre-service training in subject content, pedagogy and classroom practice, compared to the 79% average in OECD countries. Similarly, only a quarter of teachers in Italy reported participating in induction programmes when they joined their current school, compared to 42% across OECD countries (OECD, 2019). Further, based on TALIS results from 2013, one in four Italian teachers perceives a gap in their teaching methodology knowledge (OECD, 2016).

2.4 English language education

English is the *de facto* mandatory foreign language in Italian schools: although there is technically no legal provision imposing English as a requirement, over 90% of students in Italy learn English at all school levels (European Commission et al., 2017). However, English language curricula, materials and assessment procedures can vary considerably in light of the autonomy characterising the system, as discussed in the next two sections.

2.4.1 English curricula, syllabi and materials

As of 1997, schools have been granted a high degree of autonomy in decisions related to curricula and syllabi in order to accommodate the requirements of

different local contexts (Bracci, 2009). Therefore, while complying with broad national guidelines, schools can design their own curricula every three years (European Commission, 2014). National guidelines on English language education state that both language and culture ought to be subject of instruction, with learners aiming to reach a CEFR B2 level by the end of the fifth year of upper secondary school (though, as discussed in section 2.4.2, this goal is still far from being reached based on the latest available data). Students attend three to four lessons of English per week, and traditionally, the first two years of *liceo* focus on language, while starting from the third year, the study of English literature is gradually introduced, eventually replacing language.

While procedures vary across schools, teachers are generally known to agree on broad learning outcomes for their subject and on the learning materials to be used. Each teacher then drafts their own syllabus for each class based on loose national guidelines and school guidelines (where applicable). Indeed, Garton et al. (2011) note that in their analysis of ELT for young learners across five countries, Italian government policy appears the least constraining. In his interpretations of the latest TALIS survey, Schleicher (2020) reports that teacher autonomy in determining course content for Italian teachers is higher than OECD average, with over 95% of Italian respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that they have control over course content. Further, teachers generally have final say on what materials students buy. As Vettorel and Lopriore (2013) maintain, and based on my experience in the ELT publishing industry, Italy is one of the biggest markets in Europe for textbooks, as language and literature textbooks are used widely in secondary schools. Due to this wide uptake of textbooks and the lack of a centralised curriculum, English language syllabi often ultimately reflect textbook syllabi, which tend to be of the synthetic kind, i.e. based on a series of discrete items (Wilkins, 1976). For example, the two textbooks used by teachers in this study are Pearson's *Speakout* (Eales and Oakes, 2011) and Cambridge University Press' *Empower* (Doff et al., 2015). Both books present their contents by topic-based units, with each unit further sub-divided into grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation points to be covered (though *Speakout* also includes the types of activities included for the four skills). Finally, with the gradual introduction of interactive whiteboards and more sophisticated audio systems, especially in the more affluent northern regions of the country, multimedia content is also increasingly used, as are the online versions of textbooks.

Overall, while accountability for schools' financial and administrative matters may be increasing (Petrolino and Giannelli, 2014), from a pedagogical

perspective teachers appear to have retained a certain freedom regarding their choices on syllabi and materials.

2.4.2 English language assessment

In terms of how English (and listening) are assessed, upper secondary school learners sit a final examination testing English writing and speaking, preceded by the INVALSI test, a standardised test in Italian, Maths and English. The INVALSI English test includes a listening and a reading section. The listening section is based on authentic recordings, ranging from three to seven minutes in length, on which students answer closed-ended comprehension questions. While INVALSI tests were not conducted in 2020 on account of the pandemic, the 2019 results revealed that, compared to the official target of B2, 40% of students leave secondary school with only a B1 level in listening and 25% fail to even reach B1 (INVALSI, 2019).

Also in terms of standardised exams, a common expectation is that *liceo* students take Cambridge exams, such as IELTS and Cambridge First Certificate (FCE). This is seen as advantageous for learners' study abroad and work opportunities, as well as to have English credits recognised at Italian universities. Preparation for these exams, including via *ad hoc* afternoon courses, is especially common in *licei*, where students are expected to pursue tertiary studies.

It is known that Cambridge exams are influential in the Italian school culture, even more so because FCE and IELTS question types are present in textbooks. Nevertheless, given the high degree of freedom with which teachers are entrusted, it is difficult to estimate the level of washback (i.e. influence of tests on teaching and learning) this may cause, which is likely to vary substantially based on individual teachers' decisions. It is even harder to estimate INVALSI-related washback, given its relatively recent introduction in upper secondary schools, dating back only to 2019.

2.5 School context of the present study

The geographical context of this study is a medium-sized town in Emilia Romagna, a region in the north of Italy and a significantly more advantaged area than the south of the country. Academic achievement is normally higher in the north-centre (INVALSI, 2017) and schools have better infrastructure, equipment and in-service teacher training opportunities, often provided by British Council branches and affiliates. Perceived competence in English in Emilia Romagna is among the highest in the country, as is the percentage of people having study and work abroad experiences (ISTAT, 2017).

The educational setting of this research is a *liceo*, where English is taught for three to four hours a week in classes of 20 to 25 students on average. The school has approximately 1,600 students and 140 teachers (as of October 2020). It is well-known locally for its history of innovation and the quality of its teaching – as shown, among other things, by the fact that almost all of its teachers are tenured and turnover is low, an uncommon situation in Italy. It is a member of the Italian *Avanguardie Educative* ("educational avant-garde"), a group of schools committed to a manifesto based on action research and innovation (D'Anna and Nardi, 2018). One of these innovations is the implementation of the Flipped Classroom methodology in some classes of the school, in which one of my teacher participants was involved. The school also offers various scientific subjects taught in English with CLIL methodology and the opportunity for students to sit IGCSE. With regards specifically to English language education, it is also worth noting that *licei linguistici* in Italy and in this school offer weekly lessons co-taught by English teachers and English native speakers (though none of these co-taught lessons were observed in this study).

2.6 Conclusion

Various contextual factors contribute to justifying the rationale for this research. Firstly, very little language education research on Italian secondary schools has been published in international journals and books. In particular, my review of the literature uncovered no empirical study on listening and only few studies on teacher and learner "beliefs", investigated via constructs such as *perceptions*, *views* and *attitudes* (see Mariani, 2017; Aiello, 2016; Menegale, 2012; Serraggiotto, 2012). As a result, while my professional experience and some research suggests that Italian teachers find listening difficult to teach and Italian learners struggle with listening comprehension (Serraggiotto, 2012) – one of the main factors hindering the success of CLIL lessons (Coonan, 2009) – the lack of research makes it difficult to understand why this may be the case.

Secondly, listening has come to the forefront of public discourse on education in Italy in recent years following the introduction of standardised national exams of English, the INVALSI test, containing a reading and a listening section (as explained in part 2.4.2). This innovation proved challenging for language teachers and learners given the prevailing grammar-oriented teaching approaches in Italian state schools (British Council, 2018). While listening is given the same importance as the other three skills in national guidelines (European Commission et al., 2017), some evidence suggests that teaching may focus more on writing, reading and grammar (Faez, 2011). It is thus hoped that this classroom-based study will generate fresh and useful insight into how

listening is taught as well as the factors impinging on this. This is especially crucial at a stage where plans are being made to reform the pre-service teacher education system and in light of the autonomy that schools enjoy in Italy, leading to potential differences in how listening may be taught across the country.

As I discuss in the next chapter, this research investigates teachers' and learners' practices and beliefs related to listening, accounting for important contextual factors and analysing the intersections between the two sets of beliefs and practices in the classroom environment.

Chapter 3 Literature Review

This study investigates the beliefs and practices related to EFL listening of teachers and students in an Italian school. It is theoretically grounded in three domains of inquiry: listening instruction, teacher beliefs and learner beliefs. In this chapter, I discuss the relevant literature from each of these fields and the intersections among them in this study.

I begin by reviewing models of listening in a foreign language, methodological advancements in listening instruction and the degree to which these appear to have permeated to classroom practice. The second part focuses on teacher beliefs, discussing previous studies in the field of teacher cognition and my conceptualisation of teacher beliefs, their relationship to practice and contextual factors and teachers' beliefs about listening. The third part discusses language learner beliefs and beliefs about listening. This is followed by a section on previous studies investigating teacher and learner beliefs simultaneously, highlighting some limitations in their rationales and how these are tackled in the present study.

3.1 Listening

The focus of this research is teachers' and learners' beliefs and practices related to EFL listening. This section discusses conceptualisations of listening in foreign languages, how listening is taught and issues related to listening instruction.

3.1.1 Theories of listening

Although various definitions of L2 listening exist, one of the most comprehensive definitions is given by Vandergrift (1999), who describes listening comprehension as

> *a complex, active process in which the listener must discriminate between sounds, understand vocabulary and grammatical structures, interpret stress and intonation, retain what was gathered in all of the above, and interpret it within the immediate as well as the larger sociocultural context of the utterance. (p. 168)*

This definition helpfully acknowledges that listening is an active and complex skill – rather than a "passive" skill, as it has sometimes been described (Nunan, 1997) – encompassing different cognitive processes and sources of knowledge. For the sake of clarity, this research is limited to the study of unidirectional listening, that is, comprehension that does not involve the listener responding to input (e.g. watching a video).

Figure 3.1 represents a synthesis of some of the most influential theories of listening, as summarised by Goh and Vandergrift (2018). It shows how listening encompasses bottom-up and top-down processing, which can be explained by means of Anderson's (2000) three-phase model (see below), as well as the use of different sources of knowledge and of metacognition to regulate these processes.
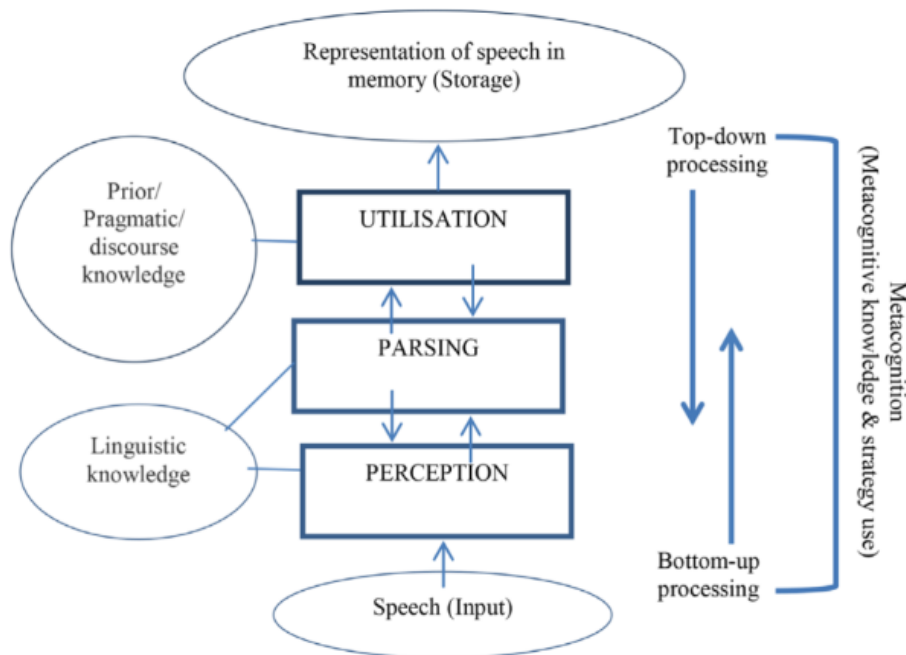
Figure 3.1: Processes and knowledge sources in listening comprehension, from Goh and Vandergrift, 2018, p. 184

Bottom-up and top-down are two of the most commonly used terms to describe listening. The former consists of decoding a text starting from its smallest units, the sounds, and gradually building up to syllables, words and complete texts, while the latter corresponds to the use of world and topic knowledge to interpret aural input (Lynch, 2009). Alternative definitions of these two processes are given by Field (2008), who describes them respectively as *decoding* and *meaning-building*. He points out that bottom-up and top-down are *directions* of processing rather than mutually exclusive types of processes, as linguistic knowledge is not exclusive of bottom-up processing: when we listen, we might indeed use our linguistic knowledge in a top-down fashion (for example, knowledge of syntactic structures may help resolve a decoding problem).

Top-down and bottom-up processing happen simultaneously and are used as needed for specific listening purposes: for instance, listening out for a specific detail might entail more bottom-up than top-down processing. Listeners generally use both to understand oral input, and the overuse of one or the other

can lead to unsuccessful comprehension. For instance, Macaro et al. (2007) reported world knowledge to be a potential hindrance, as learners who held strong expectations about listening texts based on their prior knowledge failed to revise them in light of the incoming speech.

In Figure 3.1, Goh and Vandergrift (2018) make these two directions of processing correspond broadly to the influential cognitive model of listening elaborated by Anderson (2000). His framework consists of three interconnected and overlapping phases: *perception*, the encoding of the acoustic message through segmentation of the phonemes; *parsing*, the transformation of words into a mental representation, and *utilisation*, the phase in which mental representations are related to existing knowledge.

As shown in Figure 3.1, top-down and bottom-up listening throughout the stages of perception, parsing and utilisation are regulated by metacognition. Metacognition is "awareness about one's processes in learning, and the appraisal and regulation of these processes" (Goh, 2010, p. 182). In the field of listening, metacognition is generally explained in terms of metacognitive knowledge and use of metacognitive strategies. Metacognitive knowledge refers to knowledge of self (including self-concept, a key construct in this study, as explained in 3.5.3), of the task and of the necessary strategies to accomplish it. Metacognitive listening strategies refer to techniques employed in planning, monitoring and evaluating listening comprehension (Vandergrift, 2002). Strategy use and instruction, especially related to metacognition, are among the areas of listening that have been investigated more widely (Field, 2019) and of which a more detailed discussion follows in 3.1.3.

As the discussion so far suggests, listening in a foreign language is a complex endeavour, requiring listeners to carefully orchestrate different processes simultaneously. While these processes are automatised in one's first language, information processing theories claim that learning to listen in a foreign language entails acquiring expertise in listening, moving from controlled to progressively more automatic processing (Badger, 2018). In controlled processing, less experienced listeners pay conscious attention to elements of the stream of speech; thus, low-level listeners find themselves attending closely to decoding, identifying words and parsing them, leaving limited capacity for higher order operations such as discourse construction and meaning-building (Field, 2019). The more they develop, the more listening becomes automatic and effortless, requiring less attentional capacity (Anderson, 2000).

One immediate consequence of this expertise-based model in terms of how it relates to classroom practice is that if the goal is indeed achieving automaticity,

classroom listening instruction should focus on developing the processes that learners need to become autonomous listeners. However, the ways in which this notion translates into classroom practice and is understood by teachers vary, as discussed in the next sections.

3.1.2 Listening instruction

In the listening literature, a frequent claim is made that listening instruction does a disservice to the aim of developing listening processes, focusing instead on the outcome of listening in the form of answers to comprehension questions. This tendency has been termed "Comprehension Approach" (CA) or, more broadly, "product-oriented" listening instruction (Field, 2008). Scholars supporting this claim (e.g. Graham, 2017; Swan and Walter, 2017; Nguyen and Abbott, 2016; Goh, 2010; Field, 2008) argue that listening instruction tends to follow a "listen/answer/check" pattern: teachers play an audio or video, set a comprehension task, learners listen once or more, answer questions, then their answers are checked. Lengthy pre-listening stages featuring vocabulary pre-teaching, prediction of content or schemata activation activities are also present.

Several criticisms have been levelled at this approach, described as too teacher-centric, assessment-driven and dependent on comprehension questions (Sheppard and Butler, 2017). A repeated claim is that such an approach *tests* listening rather than teach it. However, it is also fair to acknowledge that listening is an internalised skill, so learners' ability is inevitably judged indirectly by their success in answering questions or performing tasks. However, it is the use of these answers that is questioned, as CA "represents 'comprehension' narrowly in terms of correct answers to questions but does not provide a means for analysing and repairing what causes listening to go wrong" (Field, 2019, p. 184).

In order to better illustrate how listening is taught, what follows is a brief review of some of the most common types of listening activities pertaining to traditional, product-oriented approaches. These are discussed in relation to research findings about their use and their effectiveness, although descriptive accounts of how listening is taught are still rare (Siegel, 2014a). Subsequently, I briefly present methodologically innovative alternatives to these approaches. Discussing the juxtaposition between traditional and innovative approaches will inform my later examination of what we know about teachers' beliefs about listening and how they relate to these practices.

3.1.2.1 Pre-listening

Anecdotal accounts and some empirical evidence suggest that pre-listening activities, consisting of activating learners' linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge before listening, are common teaching practices. In their study of beliefs and practices of modern foreign language teachers in England, Graham and Santos (2015) surveyed 115 teachers, observed thirteen and interviewed twelve of them. Their findings show that the most common pre-listening activity was clarifying task demands, in line with a generalised concern with ensuring task completion. In the questionnaire, most teachers reported pre-teaching vocabulary and having students predict listening content; while this was observed to be less common than stated, these two pre-listening activities were still very frequent practices. The authors interpret this finding as consistent with a shared tendency among participants to scaffold listening as much as possible, even simplifying it to ensure task completion. Siegel (2014a) offers another rare example of empirical descriptions of listening instruction. He observed thirty lessons conducted by ten teachers in a Japanese university and found that about half of his participants asked learners to predict content before listening, while checking predictions after listening was done more infrequently.

These are only limited accounts; however, the notion that pre-listening activities feature highly in listening classes is also corroborated by Nguyen and Abbott's (2016) analysis of listening activities in six popular ELT textbooks, which found that prediction activities were common among all except one of the textbooks examined (and as discussed in Chapter 2, textbooks are used widely in Italian schools).

The effectiveness of pre-listening activities, including advance organisers (i.e. activities designed to stimulate existing knowledge in preparation for a task), has been the subject of a body of research, yielding mixed findings. On the one hand, Babaei et al. (2019) found that pre-teaching vocabulary improved listening comprehension. Similarly, Jafari and Hashim (2012) showed that previewing main ideas and pre-teaching difficult vocabulary improved comprehension regardless of the students' levels. On the other hand, conflicting findings arose from Chang and Read (2006). In this widely cited study, the effects of four types of listening support (previewing the test questions, repetition of the input, providing background knowledge about the topic and vocabulary instruction) were investigated. While providing background knowledge and repeating input helped learners, vocabulary instruction was the least useful activity (despite learners showing positive attitudes towards it). Further, Chang (2007) found that having more time to learn vocabulary before listening increased students' confidence and willingness to complete tasks, but

not listening comprehension. Because a limitation of these studies was the focus on the written form of words taught before listening, Mihara (2015) researched whether pre-listening vocabulary teaching featuring phonological input worked better. Her findings show that although it facilitated comprehension more than doing no pre-listening activities, there were still no significant improvements in listening comprehension (possibly, as she points out, because words pronounced in isolation sound different to words in the stream of speech).

Overall then, as Macaro et al. (2007) argue, pre-listening activities such as advance organisers might be helpful to the extent that they simplify task demands, but it is unclear whether they improve listening ability in the long term. Further, while the usefulness of pre-teaching vocabulary is contested, prediction of content is known to be useful when it becomes a strategy that learners incorporate into their listening (and not something they just use in school) and when it is followed by monitoring and checking of these predictions in light of the incoming speech (Graham, 2017).

3.1.2.2 While-listening

In terms of what learners do while they listen, based on the limited available classroom-based evidence and on textbook materials, it appears as if comprehension-based activities are still fairly widespread. In his analysis cited above, Siegel (2014a) found that comprehension questions were by far the most used technique in listening instruction. Similarly, Graham and Santos (2015) found that the two most frequent practices in the classes they observed were listening and answering questions or filling a grid, followed by listening and matching with visual or written prompts. They also observed that activities were generally audio- and textbook-based, and teacher-sourced. Students listened once or twice.

These findings highlight two main aspects of while-listening activities that are relevant to this study: the use of comprehension-based activities and the number of replays. As Field (2008) points out, comprehension questions are helpful in guiding learners, but they involve a great deal of writing, reading and understanding vocabulary, so learners' incorrect answers may be due to problems related to these reasons rather than failure to understand; therefore, materials have now evolved towards completion of tasks such as grids, notes or other types of visual support, entailing a lower amount of reading and writing.

The second aspect relates to how many times the listening input is played and the impact of this choice. Chang (2007) showed in her analysis that input repetition was helpful to learners. In their large-scale study with over 1,200 low-

level school learners in Austria, Ruhm et al. (2016) found that with clips of 25 seconds or less, a second play caused improvements, while with longer clips, findings were mixed. More recently, Field (2017) conducted a study using IELTS recordings, finding that double-play increased scores, but only marginally. Overall then, while the extent to which repeated input play helps listening comprehension may be contested, one important point, which also emerged in Field (2017), is that a second play may contribute substantially to lowering listening anxiety – a factor that, as discussed in section 3.5.2, can hinder listening comprehension.

3.1.2.3 Post-listening

Almost twenty years ago, Field (2002) claimed that using listening texts for the purpose of examining grammar reflected an outdated, structuralist view of listening. Instead, he claimed, listening had begun to be exploited for functional language and inferring unknown vocabulary. Whether this is indeed true is, however, debatable, as not much evidence exists regarding teachers' post-listening practices. Further, looking at Nguyen and Abbott (2016), their analysis of six textbooks reveals that grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation follow-up are actually common post-listening activities.

Aside from potentially harnessing listening texts for linguistic work, be it from a more structuralist or functional angle, another type of post-listening activity that seems to be widely adopted is checking students' answers to comprehension questions or tasks. In Siegel (2014a), comprehension questions, including checking students' answers to questions, was the most frequent activity observed. In Santos and Graham (2018), school teachers in Brazil focused on checking the number of correct answers given by students and comparing them to attainment standards set in the national curriculum. As the authors argue, there was little evidence of strategy development or metacognitive discussion of listening problems in the post-listening phase – a practice that is however considered beneficial in the listening literature (Nazari, 2020; Field, 2008). This emphasis on "checking" was also visible in how teachers in Santos and Graham (2018) approached the activity of verifying students' predictions mechanically, rather than to foster metacognitive reflection. Along the same lines, the teachers in Siegel (2014a) seldom checked the predictions learners made before listening at all.

3.1.3 Alternative approaches to listening instruction

In an attempt to move beyond product-based listening instruction, alternative approaches have been developed. This section discusses the features of a

process-based approach and some of its drawbacks. Subsequently, listening strategy instruction, a type of process-based instruction, is reviewed.

A process approach to listening "supports learners in clarifying, understanding, and cultivating the listening processes they are using or need to use" (Siegel, 2014b, p. 60). Rather than focusing on correct answers to set tasks, it aims to develop the processes employed by expert listeners (Goh, 2005). In his influential work on process listening, Field (2008) proposes that listening instruction should have a *diagnostic* role, whereby breakdowns in comprehension are identified and analysed, and remedial post-listening work (e.g. dictation exercises) is devised to help learners avoid repeating the same errors. Field (2008) also proposes a *prognostic* role, meaning that a programme could be designed which predicts the difficulties that are likely to occur and deals with them in advance.

Process listening thus aims to develop top-down and bottom-up processes. In this regard, there was a tendency until recently to over-focus on top-down at the expense of lower-level perceptual processes (Cauldwell, 2018). However, the teaching of bottom-up decoding (e.g. recognising phonemes, word boundaries, intonation patterns) has attracted progressively more attention in recent years, as testified by recent studies such as Yeldham (2016) and Siegel and Siegel (2015), investigating the impact of bottom-up training on listening. Siegel and Siegel (2015) found moderate but positive effects on learners in terms of motivation and overall gains in listening comprehension. Yeldham (2016) compared a listening strategies approach with an interactive approach (i.e. combining strategies and bottom-up training). Findings suggest that developing bottom-up processing may be less important than teaching compensatory strategies (such as guessing difficult words or inferring unstated information) at lower-intermediate levels.

A process approach to teaching listening is not without its practical challenges: obvious issues are represented by curriculum and classroom time constraints and a need for more teacher training than is currently available (Graham, 2017). This last problem is certainly true in the Italian context, as discussed in Chapter 2. Objections to process listening have also been raised in terms of its effectiveness. Questioning whether it is useful to teach learners how to listen, Swan and Walter (2017) claim that "language learners do not of course need to be taught to listen, everyone can listen […]. Learners' so-called listening problems are most often to do with basic decoding" (p. 233). Rather than focusing on teaching decoding, they advocate putting classroom time to better use by focusing on teaching more vocabulary. This view can be corroborated by studies such as Wolfgramm et al. (2016), van Zeeland and Schmitt (2012) and

Stæhr (2009), which found vocabulary knowledge to be a strong predictor of listening ability. However, this approach seems to replicate the assumption behind the theory that learners do not transfer their L1 reading skills successfully to the L2 until they reach a certain threshold of known vocabulary (Walter, 2003). This can be valid for reading but stops short of accounting for the differences between listening and reading vocabulary and the difficulties presented by spontaneous spoken input – a limitation that was in fact acknowledged by van Zeeland and Schmitt themselves.

A second objection to process-based instruction has come from scholars supporting Extensive Listening, such as Mayora (2017), and Renandya and Farrell (2010), who recommend having learners listen to large amounts of interesting, relevant input at their own pace as the central tool to listening development. Although Extensive Listening is useful in listening instruction, relying on it exclusively would come at the risk of leaving learners to their own devices, a view that resembles the old "practice makes perfect" adage (or the "osmosis" approach described in the following section), which relegates listening to an incidental aspect of language learning.

These criticisms have been elaborated partially with reference to doubts around listening strategy instruction, one of the areas of listening instruction that has received the most attention in recent years (Nix, 2016). Listening strategies are notoriously difficult to define and categorise, though Rost's (2002, p. 236) definition of "conscious plans to manage incoming speech" has been adopted widely. While there is disagreement in the literature over whether strategies are employed consciously or unconsciously, in this research I adopt a definition of strategies as conscious techniques on which learners can elaborate. O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) distinction between cognitive, metacognitive and socio-affective learning strategies has also been applied specifically to listening strategies, resulting in taxonomies such as the one in Goh (2002). Cognitive strategies are mental techniques used to "manipulate the material to be learnt or apply a specific technique to the learning task" (Vandergrift, 1999, p. 170). Goh (2002) sub-categorises them into inferencing, elaboration, prediction, translation, contextualisation and visualisation. Metacognitive strategies are used for "planning for, monitoring or evaluating the success of a learning activity" (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990, p. 44). When applied to listening, Goh (2002) found that metacognitive strategies include pre-listening preparation, selective attention (noticing specific parts of the input), directed attention (monitoring attention and avoiding distractions), comprehension monitoring during listening, real-time assessment of the input and comprehension evaluation after listening. As Field (2008) and others have noted, part of the

problem defining strategies is that the boundaries between cognitive and metacognitive strategies are at times blurred. Finally, socio-affective strategies aim to foster positive emotional reactions towards language learning. With reference to listening, Vandergrift (2003, p. 427) defines them as "the techniques listeners employ to collaborate with others, to verify understanding, or to lower anxiety".

The key question around whether listening strategies help comprehension seems to have found an overall positive answer: studies have found that expert listeners differ from lower-level listeners not only in the number and frequency of strategies they use (Chang, 2009; Shang, 2008), but also in how they use them (Graham et al., 2008; Berne, 2004), as they manage to combine them more effectively as needed to solve listening problems (Lau, 2017).

What is still debated, however, is whether strategy *instruction* works. Some of the most frequent objections to strategy instruction include the lack of conclusive evidence supporting its relationship with listening development and listening in real-life situations, the demands that it puts on teachers in terms of training and classroom time, and terminological confusion undermining the replicability of studies (Vanderplank, 2014; Ridgway, 2000). Regarding this last point, in order to clarify the potential terminological confusion between strategies and processes, and while acknowledging that the two overlap at times, the present study follows the distinction made by Field (2019). He specifies that processes are those typical of "normal" listening, such as those detailed in section 3.1.1, while strategies refer explicitly to *compensatory* techniques to deal with listening problems, such as those outlined in Goh (2002).

Some studies have provided evidence supporting the effectiveness of strategy instruction. Siegel's (2015) action research project investigating the introduction of listening strategy instruction revealed that students made gains in listening comprehension (as shown by their pre/post test scores) and perceived this innovation positively. Although research on strategy instruction may be hindered by different definitions of strategy trainings in different studies to be able to draw meaningful conclusions, Santos and Graham (2018) make a useful summary point claiming that overall, studies that have included a reflective and metacognitive component in strategy instruction seem to have yielded more consistently positive results in terms of listening gains.

In conclusion, as listening has progressively attracted more attention from researchers and teachers, approaches that offer an alternative to exclusively product-oriented listening have been designed. Nevertheless, these seem to be

struggling to be adopted in mainstream classrooms. One possible reason is that their presence in textbooks continues to be limited. Further, Renandya and Hu (2018) argue that three more factors may be hindering the uptake of innovations in listening instruction. First, teachers may lack access to the relevant literature and be unaware of recent developments; second, the literature itself presents contrasting accounts of how to best teach listening; third, contextual factors such as lack of access to suitable teaching materials and online resources may prevent teachers from innovating their listening instruction. While these contextual factors will play a role in holding teachers back from experimenting with listening, their beliefs about listening are also likely to be an important influence on their practice, as is discussed in the next section.

3.2 Teacher beliefs

The study of teacher beliefs is part of the domain of teacher cognition, "the study of what teachers think, know, believe and do" (Borg, S., 2003, p. 81). Interest in teacher cognition in language education has grown exponentially in the past twenty years, focusing on constructs such as beliefs and knowledge as influencing and being influenced by teachers' actions. More recently, the 'social turn' in applied linguistics (Block, 2003) has prompted an extension of the scope of language teacher cognition, emphasising its social, dynamic and situated nature and avoiding a focus exclusively on internal, isolated psychological processes (Burri et al., 2017). The field has thus embraced the emotional and situated nature of teacher cognition, as shown in this recent definition from Borg, S. (2019, p. 20), where teacher cognition research is seen as:

> *Inquiry which seeks, with reference to their personal, professional, social, cultural and historical contexts, to understand teachers' minds and emotions and the role these play in the process of becoming, being and developing as a teacher.*

Teacher beliefs are among the most widely studied topics in language teacher cognition research. However, a lack of criticality in their use has been noted (Borg, S., 2018), as researchers have shown different levels of precision in defining beliefs, distinguishing them from similar constructs, operationalising them and clarifying their relationship with teaching practice. In the following sections, I endeavour to clarify these issues and provide a rationale for the study of teacher beliefs in this research.

3.2.1 Definition

Teacher cognition has long been characterised by a proliferation of terms describing teachers' mental lives, but two of the most used constructs remain *beliefs* and *knowledge*. Different positions have been adopted: while some

scholars use "cognitions" as an umbrella term – as in Baker (2014), where cognitions include beliefs, knowledge, perceptions and attitudes – others have distinguished beliefs from knowledge, claiming that the former are more evaluative and disputable and the latter is more objective and open to critical re-examination in light of new objective evidence (Richardson, 1996; Grossman et al., 1989).

On a theoretical level, in the ELT domain, this claim about knowledge could plausibly apply to aspects of propositional, "objective" knowledge, such as knowledge of the language or of examination formats in a certain educational context. Operationalising this construct, however, is more complicated, as "in the mind of the teacher, components of knowledge, beliefs, conceptions and intuitions are inextricably intertwined" (Verloop et al., 2001, p. 446). Consequently, a study of teachers' work aiming to separate beliefs from knowledge is likely to find that in practice, it is difficult to work with a firm distinction. In their study of teacher knowledge, Grossman et al. (1989, p. 31) acknowledge: "while we are trying to separate teachers' knowledge and belief about subject matter for the purposes of clarity, we recognise that the distinction is blurry at best". Based on the interpretivist nature of this research, focusing on how teachers and learners construct their realities (rather than some univocal reality), it is unlikely that teachers actively make a distinction. This is especially true of the teachers in this research, who all have over twenty years of experience and for whom accumulated practice is likely to strengthen the extent to which they believe their ideas are true, "whether or not [they are] verified as true in some sort of objective, external way" (Alexander et al., 1991, p. 317). Consequently, while I acknowledge these theoretical debates, given that the aim of this research is to study the teachers' emic perspective, I make no explicit distinction between belief and knowledge and expect that my analysis of beliefs will inevitably cover aspects that might be classified as propositional knowledge (such as knowledge of the structure of a proficiency test).

I adopt the following definition of teacher beliefs, highlighting their affective and evaluative nature and acknowledging the emotional dimension that has gained prominence in recent teacher cognition research: propositions that "may be consciously or unconsciously held, [are] evaluative in that [they are] accepted as true by the individual, and [are] therefore imbued with emotive commitment" (Borg, M., 2001, p. 1). Other important aspects of the teacher belief construct are the core and peripheral dimensions, the generic and topic-specific dimension, and the attributed/professed and individual/collective distinctions. The next three sections discuss these aspects, which contribute to my operationalisation of teacher beliefs.

3.2.2 Sources of beliefs

Teacher education, previous learning experiences and teaching experience are among the main sources of teachers' beliefs studied in the literature (Nishino, 2012). Firstly, teachers' beliefs are influenced positively and negatively by years of observing teachers during schooling, a phenomenon termed *apprenticeship of observation* by Lortie (1975). Studies such as Vinogradova and Ross (2019) and Johnson, K.E. (1994) have shown that the beliefs of pre-service teachers can be influenced by the images of their teachers formed in their years of language learning. Moodie's (2016) study of South Korean English teachers provided evidence for an "anti-apprenticeship of observation", suggesting that negative prior language learning experiences can also provide a model of what not to do as a teacher.

Further, teaching experience can shape the beliefs and practices of teachers. Studies suggest that their accumulated experiences of what they see as successful in their classrooms inform their beliefs and practices (Breen et al., 2001). In their analysis of the origins of ESL teachers' ideas, Crookes and Arakaki (1999) found that the most cited source of ideas was teaching experience, conceived of as a "personal history of knowledge and information gained through trial and error" (p. 16). Based on their study of grammar teaching beliefs and practices of three in-service EFL teachers in Turkey, Phipps and Borg (2009) found that the most influential beliefs held by teachers were those grounded in experience, hypothesising that core beliefs (i.e. more stable and influential beliefs) tend to correspond to experientially ingrained beliefs.

3.2.3 Relationship with practice

Beliefs can be reflected in classroom practices, but this may not always be the case. The belief-practice relationship has been the subject of several studies, with mixed findings of incongruence (e.g. Karimi and Nazari, 2017; Farrell et al., 2005) and congruence (e.g. Johnson, K.E., 1992). In this regard, the present research aims to problematise this relationship, which, as Kubanyiova and Feryok (2015) claim, has sometimes been oversimplified, resting on the debatable assumption that a convergence of beliefs and practice is a sign of good teaching.

Indeed, belief research has been criticised for eliciting teacher beliefs without sufficient contextualisation, detecting divergences with observed teaching and then investigating why teachers may not teach in accordance with their beliefs (Borg, S., 2012). Most studies thus show discrepancies between beliefs and

practice: in her review of (mainly doctoral) research, Basturkmen (2012) reports limited correspondence between teachers' stated beliefs and their practices. However, there are various explanations for this finding that do not relate directly to inconsistencies between beliefs and practices. Firstly, while practical, questionnaires (which have been widely employed in belief research) have limitations when used in isolation to study teacher beliefs, as they are likely to reveal theoretical and socially acceptable beliefs that inevitably diverge from observed practice (Borg, S., 2006). Furthermore, discrepancies can be explained with reference to contextual factors (e.g. syllabi or examinations, as discussed below), the co-existence of contrasting core and peripheral beliefs, held with more or less conviction, or a lack of shared understanding, by researcher and participants, of terminology, as shown by Graham et al. (2014). In their study of modern foreign language teachers, discrepancies emerged between the stated importance of teaching how to listen effectively and the lack of consistent practices. The authors explained this by noting that for the teacher participants, "listening effectively" may have meant "successfully completing tasks".

Finally, Borg, S. (2018) argues that studies should clarify whether they investigate professed beliefs (what teachers *say* that they believe) or attributed beliefs (their beliefs as *inferred* from their practice). Since most studies work with professed beliefs, discrepancies with observed practice are more likely to occur, as teachers may only express idealised versions of their beliefs and practices. In the present research, I further analyse the professed/attributed distinction, as beliefs can arguably be both professed (reported by teachers) and enacted, as researchers attribute beliefs to teachers to some extent based on their observed behaviours and self-reports. In light of the above, I define beliefs as professed (reported by teachers) as well as enacted (attributed to them by the researcher in a way that is as close as possible to the teachers' own sense-making); hence, beliefs are analysed as explanations given by teachers for their practices, allowing for a degree of interpretation on my part (which was at least partially offset through member validation, as discussed in Chapter 4, section 4.7.2). In terms of the belief-practice relationship, this research does not investigate why teachers may or may not act on their beliefs, as it is now established that

> *teachers' beliefs are part of a complex multidimensional system with potential clusters of contrasting beliefs that are or are not enacted in given moments of practice due to a variety of factors that are situated within the teacher and social context (Gregoire-Gill and Fives, 2014, p. 7).*

Consequently, I aim to understand how teachers make sense of their practice, be it by means of cognitive, emotional or contextual factors. Belief-practice congruence is also not considered a pre-requisite for good practice, as it can exist even in the case of "bad" practice: for example, in Lim and Chai (2008), the teacher participant who held the more "traditional" beliefs about teaching also implemented them more consistently through less effective teaching practices.

One final key point should be discussed about contextual factors. The role of context has been a point of contention in recent debates around how teacher cognition has been "cognitivist" and "individualist" (Burns et al., 2015), using beliefs as reified, decontextualised constructs (Kubanyiova and Feryok, 2015). Although Borg's (2006) influential model of teacher cognition places classroom practice *within* contextual factors (rather than separate to them), a repeated claim in language teacher research is that teachers may not act according to their beliefs due to contextual factors, thus equating these factors to *constraints.* In this research, however, my familiarity with the Italian context allowed me to see from the outset that some factors, such as textbooks or examinations, may matter, but school teachers enjoy a certain degree of freedom in decisions and low accountability in their work; therefore, contextual factors may not be constraints strictly speaking and are investigated not only as external forces mediating the teachers' practices, but also with reference to the teachers' *beliefs about* such factors.

3.2.4 New perspectives on beliefs and practices

In light of the above, this study aims to move beyond one-dimensional belief-practice relationships, toward understandings of the multidimensional, paradoxical nature of beliefs as evoked in practice by context (Gregoire-Gill and Fives, 2014), accounting for the following dimensions:

o **Core and peripheral beliefs**. The relationship between beliefs and practice may vary based on the position of a belief within a teacher's belief system: *core* beliefs appear to be more strongly held (Green, 1971) and supersede peripheral beliefs when tensions arise (Phipps and Borg, 2009).

o **Generic and topic-specific beliefs.** It is common for belief studies to focus on specific aspects of teaching (Buehl and Beck, 2015). By researching listening, this study itself aims to address a relatively under-researched and specific topic. Nevertheless, teachers may hold contrasting beliefs or hold beliefs at different levels of specificity (e.g. from generic beliefs about education to specific beliefs about pre-listening

activities). For instance, in Farrell and Ives (2014), generic beliefs about education (such as the importance of critical thinking) were found to be just as influential as more specific beliefs about reading.

- o **Individual and collective beliefs.** Collective beliefs are an underexplored and complementary dimension to more individually oriented teacher belief research. In one of the few studies in language education investigating this aspect, Breen et al. (2001) observed and interviewed eighteen ESL teachers in Australia about their work, revealing that beliefs shared by teachers explained different practices and, vice versa, similar practices were explained with reference to different principles. More recently, other attempts have been made to research shared beliefs of teachers working in the same context, such as England's (2017) study on the collective epistemological beliefs of Indonesian language teacher educators. Nevertheless, this remains an under-researched area of language teacher cognition and one that this study seeks to address, especially as it investigates a group of teachers with similar demographic characteristics and experience working in the same school context.

3.3 Teachers' beliefs about listening

Despite the popularity enjoyed by teacher belief research in language education, listening remains a relatively under-researched substantive area (Emerick, 2019). While some studies have touched upon teacher beliefs about listening tangentially, the few studies that have focused specifically on teachers' beliefs (under different guises, including perceptions and attitudes) about listening are summarised below. Siegel (2015) included teacher and learner data, though Table 3.1 only reports on the teacher data. The table only includes studies published in English, accessible – e.g. Gao and Liu (2013) was inaccessible – and of sufficient methodological quality. For instance, Abdullah (2014) was excluded because, in spite of its focus on teachers' beliefs and practices regarding top-down listening, no explanations are offered to justify how the author analysed the data to conclude that all the teacher participants taught top-down listening "very poorly". Finally, only peer-reviewed studies were included in the review, thus excluding MA theses such as Yükselci (2003).

Table 3.1: Studies of teachers' beliefs about listening

Study	Objective	Context	Methods	Participants	Key findings
Jones (2020)	To analyse stated beliefs and practices regarding bottom-up listening instruction	Worldwide (online survey)	Questionnaire with Likert scale items	63 teachers of English	• Teachers reporting teaching bottom-up listening are a minority; • Teachers do not believe in basing their instruction on L1-L2 phonological differences.
Nazari (2020)	To evaluate whether a teacher education course on metacognitive listening instruction impacts teachers' beliefs and practices	A language centre in Iran	Pre- and post-course interviews and video-taped classroom observations	4 teachers of English	• Teachers' beliefs evolve from being aligned with a product approach to a process-based, metacognitive approach; • Teachers' practices post-course are congruent with metacognitive instruction.
Emerick (2019)	To analyse stated beliefs and practices regarding explicit teaching and authentic materials in listening	Six universities in USA	Questionnaire with Likert scale items; semi-structured interviews	60 teachers of English and Spanish (questionnaire); 6 teachers (interviews)	• Teachers believe explicit listening instruction is essential, but conflate strategy instruction, listening practice, and listening assessment; • Teachers believe in the value of authentic materials but conceptualise authenticity in different ways.
Santos and Graham (2018), Graham and Santos (2015) and Graham et al. (2014)	To analyse stated beliefs and practices and observed practices of MFL teachers in England; to compare beliefs about listening held by MFL teachers in England and EFL teachers in Brazil	Secondary schools in England; schools in Brazil	Two versions of a questionnaire with closed- and open-ended items; classroom observations; interviews	115 MFL teachers in England (questionnaire) and 40 EFL teachers in Brazil (questionnaire); 13 MFL teachers (observation); 12 MFL teachers (interviews)	• Teachers in both countries believe in teaching learners to listen effectively; teachers in England equate this with "task completion", while Brazilian teachers define it as "comprehension"; • Product-oriented approaches prevail in both countries; • Teachers in England seem aware of bottom-up difficulties, but report doing little bottom-up classroom work; • Some teachers in England express dissatisfaction with their current practices but report lacking time or expertise to find alternatives.

Karimi and Nazari (2017)	To analyse stated beliefs and practices regarding listening	Private language universities in Iran	Questionnaire with Likert scale items; classroom observations (with a listening activity to teach set by researchers); semi-structured interviews	91 BA and MA EFL teachers in Iran (questionnaire); 12 teachers (interviews and observations)	• No significant differences are detected in the beliefs of BA and MA teachers; • No significant relationship is detected between beliefs and practices. Despite being aware of learners' difficulties (e.g. decoding problems), teachers cite lack of time and knowledge as preventing them from implementing more innovative approaches to tackle them.
Siegel (2015)	To analyse learners' and teachers' perceptions about the introduction of listening strategy instruction programme	University in Japan	Interviews; classroom observations; researcher journal	One EFL teacher, one teacher-researcher	• The EFL teacher holds overall positive beliefs about the innovation of listening strategy instruction, albeit with a few caveats related to students' perceptions and contextual factors.
Wang, L. and Renandya (2012)	To analyse teachers' beliefs about effective instruction to solve learners' listening difficulties	Universities in China	Interviews	Ten EFL teachers	• Teachers believe that vocabulary instruction, topic preparation, slowing down the rate of speech and repeated input are effective approaches to tackle listening problems; • Teachers vary in their beliefs about the value of strategy instruction; teachers who received training in this aspect believe in their effectiveness more.
Bouziri (2007)	To analyse stated teachers' attitudes and practices about listening instruction	Four universities in Tunisia	Questionnaire (28 teachers); interviews (27 teachers); classroom observation (5 teachers)	28 teachers	• Teachers believe the objective of listening activities is firstly speaking, followed by understanding; • Teachers believe that practice of listening leads to improvement in listening ability; • The majority of listening activities that teachers report doing are based on comprehension questions, mostly requiring literal rather than inferential comprehension.

Based on Table 3.1, some considerations about the nature and findings of these studies can be made. First, studies of teachers' beliefs about listening are overwhelmingly set in universities. This is not surprising and reflects a broader imbalance toward university settings in ELT research and the need for more studies focusing on secondary school learners – possibly the largest group of EFL students worldwide (Pinter, 2016). In terms of participants, the studies reviewed range widely from small to larger samples. Looking at methods, it is clear that questionnaires (especially based on closed-ended items) and interviews are still widely used (despite the limitations outlined in the Chapter 4, section 4.6.5). Classroom observations also feature in five of the eight studies reviewed above. It is positive to see studies including classroom observations, as this is likely to reduce artificial gaps between beliefs and practices, though some weaknesses emerge from the studies at hand. Nazari (2020) and Karimi and Nazari (2017) used non-naturalistic observations (i.e. they assigned teacher participants specific materials to teach). These are of limited value in understanding teachers' everyday practices and go some way to explaining the teacher-practice mismatches detected. Siegel (2015) only included himself as a teacher-researcher, a fellow EFL teacher and a debriefer in his analysis, and the teacher side of the study appeared to be a minor component compared to the learners'. Bouziri (2007) used observations but did not cite any observational data when discussing her results, referring instead only to self-reported teacher data. While observations are an important tool in the study of teachers' beliefs, the ways and rationales for their use appear unclear in some cases.

In terms of topics, most of the studies focus on beliefs about teaching listening, sometimes on specific sub-topics (e.g. bottom-up activities, strategy instruction). Another topic common to various studies is listening difficulties. In addition, Emerick (2019) investigated beliefs about authenticity. In terms of common findings, Santos and Graham (2018) and Wang, L. and Renandya (2012) seem to confirm that teachers hold beliefs about the usefulness of pre-listening vocabulary teaching and content prediction, two seemingly established teaching practices. A finding that also emerges is the "unprincipled" nature of teachers' beliefs about listening (or perhaps the disconnect between accepted academic best practices and teachers' beliefs). This appears clear in the chasm between researchers' conceptions of teaching listening, geared towards teaching listening processes, and teachers' beliefs, corresponding to task completion, in the England-based sample of Santos and Graham (2018). Echoing these findings, Emerick (2019) found that while teachers believed in the importance of

teaching listening explicitly, to them this meant product-oriented teaching, with an emphasis on continuous listening practice and assessment.

Three main orientations emerge regarding how teachers in various contexts conceptualise the teaching of listening: listening as task completion, listening for other skills and systems, and listening by osmosis. While the first of these orientations has been examined in section 3.1.2, in my examination of the Comprehension Approach, the other two deserve a dedicated brief discussion.

In the absence of a focus on listening in its own right, a common belief around listening seems to be that it is subordinate to developing other skills and systems. It is indeed not uncommon for listening input to be used as a pretext to extract vocabulary or grammar points, or as a springboard for speaking activities (Siegel, 2015). Bouziri (2007) found that "speaking" was ranked as the main purpose for doing listening by the teachers that she surveyed. Evidence from Nguyen and Abbott's (2016) analysis of ELT textbooks also corroborates this notion, as follow-up speaking, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary activities were found to be extremely common corollaries to listening activities. It should be noted, however, that this view of listening is not entirely atheoretical: the role of listening in language development is in fact acknowledged in the SLA literature, perhaps even more so in recent times following findings about the effectiveness of watching captioned videos in vocabulary acquisition (Montero Pérez et al., 2013). Acknowledging how listening contributes to language development, Richards, J. (2005) advocates a dual use of listening in the classroom, for comprehension as well as for language acquisition. However, he also recognises the dangers involved in this approach when he cautions that teachers

> *might ignore the importance of teaching listening as comprehension and revert to using listening texts as the basis for a testing-approach to teaching listening, in effect concentrating exclusively on accurate identification of the content and language of a text (p. 91).*

Another apparently widespread view is what Siegel (2015) called the "osmosis approach". Possibly connected to Audiolingualism, viewing listening as a skill that develops unconsciously via exposure to input, this belief sees listening as developing autonomously and not necessitating dedicated classroom time (somewhat overlapping with Extensive listening). While there are arguments for prolonged exposure to listening input, there is also consensus in the listening literature that listening is a skill that can be developed in its own right in the classroom.

The analysis of the literature also reveals teachers' feelings of dissatisfaction with their current teaching and their struggle to find alternatives. Indeed,

listening has long been acknowledged as a problem for teachers, who, despite deeming it important, may be unsure how to teach it (Cauldwell, 2018). Studies such as Graham et al. (2014) suggest that teachers have a "mechanistic" view of listening instruction, equating successful listening to task completion. This has led to the claim that teachers "do" or test listening rather than teach it (Cauldwell, 2018). Innovative teaching approaches such as strategy training seem to be viewed more favourably by those teachers who trained in them (Wang, L. and Renandya, 2012) or experimented with them first-hand (Jones, 2020; Siegel, 2015). The teachers surveyed in Karimi and Nazari (2017), however, seem dissatisfied with their approach to listening and lament not having the knowledge, time or resources to improve their practices. Teachers in Graham et al. (2014) also cite contextual factors such as lack of classroom time, syllabi constraints and a lack of training as being responsible for their practice. Another contributing factor may be standardised examinations, whose comprehension-based format is also reflected in several textbooks, likely impinging on teaching practices.

One final aspect of listening on which teachers seem to hold beliefs is listening difficulties. Teachers seem to be aware especially of the difficulties posed by bottom-up decoding. In line with a generalised struggle to locate alternatives, they however appear unsure as to how to tackle these alternatives (Santos and Graham, 2018). In a different context, and more reassuringly, the teachers in Renandya and Hu (2018) appear increasingly more aware of the range of options at their disposal for tackling listening problems. Listening difficulties are discussed more in depth in relation to learner beliefs in section 3.5.1.

3.4 Learner beliefs

Learner beliefs have also been the subject of several studies based on overlapping constructs, including perceptions, attitudes and cognitions (Wesely, 2012). This is an area that has been studied in general education and psychology, leading to the understanding that learners' beliefs about themselves and their ability are more central to understanding their academic performance than previously thought (Bernat, 2008). Beliefs can influence learning outcomes and learner behaviour (Weinert and Kluwe, 1987). Further, beliefs in one's ability are related to one's expectations of success: realistic expectations tend to help learners feel confident, and vice versa, thus helping or hindering learning success (Puchta, 1999).

Interest in learner beliefs related to language learning arose in the 1980s, with Horwitz's (1985) Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) questionnaire about language learner beliefs. In addition to this mostly

quantitative approach, termed "traditional" by Barcelos and Kalaja (2003), more contextualised approaches to the study of learner beliefs have emerged. Learner beliefs tend to be viewed as embedded in contexts and investigated through emic perspectives via diverse and triangulated methods. Although questionnaires are still a key feature of learner belief studies, diverse methods have been employed, such as learner narratives (Peng, 2011), metaphor analysis (Wan et al., 2011), classroom observations, interviews (Graham, 2006) and visual representations (Aragão, 2011).

Language learner beliefs are defined in this study as "conceptions, ideas and opinions learners have about L2 learning and teaching and language itself" (Kalaja et al., 2018, p. 222). In acknowledging the shift toward "contextual" approaches to the study of language learner beliefs, recent definitions have also acknowledged their context-bound, complex, dynamic and affective nature. The present research accounts for these important notions, while also acknowledging the more limited role of learner beliefs compared to teacher beliefs in this study.

The contextual and affective nature of beliefs is clearly a key issue in the literature. Beliefs are deemed to be tied to the context of learning, with learners interacting and re-shaping their personal understandings of their learning in specific spaces. This includes their beliefs about classroom instruction, which can influence their learning: learners may have "hidden agendas" which, "as much as the teacher's objectives, determine what learners take from any given lesson" (Nunan, 1989, p. 176). As we will see below, this has led some studies to investigate learners' and teachers' beliefs simultaneously, in an attempt to understand how these mutual influences might impact learning.

In recognition of the increasing focus on emotions in language education and applied linguistics (Dewaele, 2019), it is also acknowledged that learner beliefs have not only a cognitive but also an affective dimension. This is reflected, for example, in the attachment that learners have to their beliefs, and in the connection between learner beliefs and emotions. Although this theme has only recently begun to be explored more widely in learner belief research, studies such as Aragão (2011) suggest that beliefs and emotions are closely linked and are connected to learners' self-concept. In his study of students in a language teacher education course in Brazil, embarrassment emotions were related to learners' self-concept (as we will see, a key type of learner belief), influencing how learners saw themselves in the classroom and how they behaved. This emotional side of learner beliefs is thus important in the present study related to listening development, in which self-concept and emotions such as listening anxiety are acknowledged to be influential factors (as discussed in 3.5). Further,

there is evidence that beliefs can guide learners in selecting and adopting learning strategies (Hu and Tian, 2012; Ellis, 2008) and impact their self-regulated learning (Maclellan, 2015), two key factors in listening development.

3.5 Learners' beliefs about listening

In analysing the literature on learners' beliefs about listening, it is necessary to acknowledge some caveats. The first is that extensive discussions of learner beliefs are not common to the majority of studies investigating learners' beliefs: similar to teacher beliefs, learner beliefs are frequently either not defined at all or referred to as perceptions, attitudes, views or opinions. When listening is the subject of the investigation of learners' beliefs, due to the influential model of metacognitive knowledge proposed by Goh (2008), learner beliefs are sometimes seen as part of "person knowledge" (i.e. knowledge of self, including self-concept) and investigated within that framework.

Overall, as discussed in section 3.4, learners' beliefs about language, learning, language learning and more specifically, listening, can have an impact on how students approach listening (Rubin, 2005). For example, unrealistic beliefs about needing to understand every word may generate counterproductive listening behaviour, highly dependent on lower-level decoding at the expense of more general comprehension (Yeldham, 2018). This section reviews a selection of studies that have investigated learner beliefs about listening, including studies about related constructs, studies focusing specifically on listening and studies only investigating listening tangentially. From my review of the literature, four areas emerge as key topics on which research has focused: listening difficulties, self-beliefs (i.e. self-efficacy, self-concept and attributions), anxiety and innovative listening programmes (especially related to strategy instruction). These areas are reviewed in the following sections (except beliefs about innovations related to strategy instruction, due to their limited relevance to the present research).

3.5.1 Listening difficulties

It is not uncommon for research studies about listening to claim that listening is perceived as difficult by learners or as more difficult than other skills. In the Italian context, Serraggiotto's (2012) survey on L2/L3 learning experiences in secondary schools revealed that recent school graduates found listening and speaking the most difficult skills in EFL and that listening was the skill in which they believed they had improved the least. Coonan's (2016) investigation of first-year university students in Italy also suggests that a key difficulty in English

as a Medium of Instruction is understanding lectures in English (specifically, recognising words and taking notes while listening).

Nevertheless, listening difficulties have been the subject of a comparatively high number of studies in the listening literature, although not all of them have defined difficulties as learners' *beliefs* necessarily, but as perceptions or reported difficulties. However, if learners' beliefs are "conceptions, ideas and opinions learners have about L2 learning and teaching and language itself" (Kalaja et al., 2018, p. 222), this also encompasses their beliefs about what makes listening difficult for them. In Table 3.2, I offer a summary of some recent studies of listening difficulties. The studies were selected based on their relevance to the topic, methodological quality and accessibility. Only peer-reviewed studies and doctoral theses were included. An important point to note is that studies have been somewhat hard to compare because they were based on different categorisations of difficulties: consequently, the categories used in each study are also listed below for the sake of clarity.

Table 3.2: Studies of listening difficulties

Study	Objective	Context	Participants	Types of difficulties	Methods	Key findings
Namazi andost et al. (2019)	To investigate listening comprehension problems and strategies used by learners and their interrelationship	A private language institute in Iran	60 learners aged 15-17	• Process • Input • Listener • Task • Affect • Context	5-point Likert scale questionnaire	• Input is rated as the main difficulty.
Brunfaut and Révész (2015)	To investigate the relationship between listening and various task and listener characteristics.	A UK university	93 learners aged 18-43	• Linguistic complexity • Explicitness • Speed of delivery • Response (i.e. task format) • Working memory • Listening anxiety	• Listening anxiety questionnaire • Working memory test • Proficiency test • Listening tasks	• Task difficulty correlates with phonological, discourse, and lexical complexity and with referential cohesion: • Better listening performances are delivered by less anxious listeners and by those with better working memory.
Wang, L. and Fan (2015)	To compare teacher and learner perceptions about the listening difficulties experienced of low-level learners	Three universities in China	131 low proficiency learners aged 19-22 and 30 teachers	• General-language text variables • Listening-specific text variables • Processing • Listener • Task • External environment	• 5-point Likert scale questionnaire • Learner and teacher interviews	• Main difficulties for both teachers and learners are text- and processing-related.
Révész and Brunfaut (2013)	To investigate the effects of task factors on advanced English learners' actual and perceived listening performance	A university in the UK	77 learners aged 17-35 attending an English for Academic Purposes programme	• Speed of delivery • Phonological complexity • Lexical complexity • Syntactic complexity • Discourse complexity	• Listening task • 5-point Likert scale perception questionnaire • Stimulated-recall interviews	• Speed of delivery does not predict listening performance; • Lexical complexity predicts higher task demands; • Task difficulty is not affected by syntactic complexity.

				• Explicitness		
Chang et al. (2013)	To identify the listening difficulties of L2 learners	A college in Taiwan	1,056 low-level learners aged 18-19	• Text • Input channel and surroundings • Relevance • Listener • Speaker • task	• 6-point Likert scale questionnaire	• 73% of students perceive listening as difficult; • 57% of L2 listening difficulties can be explained by the six factors; • Input (unknown words, grammar structures, unfamiliar topics, abstract concepts, long sentences) is the most important factor contributing to difficulties; • Apart from the difficulties arising from learners themselves (listener factor), all factors are outside learners' control.
Graham, (2006)	To investigate MFL learners' perceptions of listening comprehension	Ten secondary schools in the UK	595 students (questionnaire; 28 students (interviews)	Not defined *a priori*	• Questionnaire with 6-point Likert scale and open-ended items • Interviews	• Main difficulties are speed, distinguishing words and making sense of words identified; • Common attributions for failure at listening are innate ability and task difficulty; • The majority of learners identify listening as their area of least success.
Goh (2000)	To identify the listening difficulties of ESL learners	Universities in China	40 students (diaries); 17 students (small group interviews); 23 (retrospective interviews). Average age: 19.	• Perception • Parsing • Utilisation	• Learner diaries • Small group interviews • Immediate retrospective verbalisations	• Problems common to more than half students are quickly forgetting what is heard (parsing), not recognising known words (perception) and understanding words but not intended message (utilisation); • Half of the problems reported by students are related to perception; • Low-ability listeners have more low-level perception problems

A first observation based on this review is that, as Bloomfield et al. (2011) argue, inconsistencies exist regarding how listening difficulties are defined, making it harder to compare studies. Nevertheless, some interpretations can be drawn. First, features of the input, defined differently in different studies and including aspects such as vocabulary, grammar and topic, appear to impact listening across studies. Processing, involving factors such as working memory and perception, also appears to be a key difficulty: this is especially true of lower-level processing (i.e. bottom-up decoding obstacles such as identifying words), found to be hard for lower-level listeners. Listener variables including, crucially, anxiety, also emerge as negatively impacting listening (as discussed further in 3.5.2). Finally, although the speed of delivery may be consistently perceived by listeners as a major hindrance (Bloomfield et al., 2011), this belief is put into question by some studies about speed in L2 listening. In Sheppard and Butler's (2017) paused transcription study investigating learners' bottom-up decoding, no significant correlation was found between articulation rate and learners' success in decoding phrases, corroborating previous studies such as Derwing and Munro (2001), which found that lower rates of speed are not necessarily preferred by learners. On the other hand, however, studies such as Brindley and Slatyer (2002) and Buck and Tatsuoka (1998) found that speed of delivery increases listening difficulty.

3.5.2 Listening anxiety

As discussed above, anxiety related to listening can impact listening comprehension. In school environments where listening is taught with product-oriented approaches, listening may be perceived as a test and a source of anxiety for students and teachers, potentially impacting teachers' ways of dealing with difficult listening. Listening anxiety can be regarded as a listening difficulty with links to other difficulties and constructs, such as self-concept.

Anxiety has been one of the most widely studied areas of research on emotions in language education (Dewaele, 2019). It was initially investigated as generic "foreign language anxiety" and defined by Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 128) as ''a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process". Evidence then progressively emerged supporting the notion of anxiety as a situation- and skill-specific construct (Kimura, 2011), leading to studies investigating the type of anxiety related to events requiring listening in the classroom. For instance, Elkhafaifi (2005) found a significant portion of variance between "foreign language classroom anxiety" and "foreign language

listening anxiety", suggesting that foreign language listening anxiety is a construct in its own right.

Although some evidence points to certain beneficial effects of anxiety on language proficiency (e.g. Brown et al., 2001), suggesting that anxiety may sometimes be a motivator (Chow et al., 2018), several studies utilising quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods have pointed to the negative relationship between listening anxiety and listening comprehension (Chow et al., 2018; Valizadeh and Alavinia, 2013; Bekleyen, 2009).

As more research becomes available around listening anxiety, it appears clearer that anxiety is mediated and caused by a host of interrelated factors and it is thus limiting to analyse it in isolation. Both Zhang, X. (2013) and Bekleyen (2009) argue that sources of listening anxiety can be multiple, including beliefs, self-concept, motivation, testing and classroom procedures. In Zhang (2013), negative self-belief was found to be associated with listening anxiety. Negative self-concept, loosely defined by Vogely (1998, p. 68) as "a low level of confidence in the area of listening" (but further articulated in 3.5.3), can thus be another important cause of listening anxiety.

Listening anxiety appears to be connected to different sources. Kimura (2011) found that it is a two-dimensional concept, composed of self-focused apprehension (concern over social evaluative threat) and task-focused apprehension (worry over effective processing). Vogely's (1998) study about sources of listening anxiety cites several of the difficulties discussed in section 3.5.1, namely, text (difficult vocabulary and syntax) and speaker (speed, accent) and processing variables. Issues related to processing were also found to be key factors in Bekleyen (2009), where failure to recognise known words or weak forms was reported as a major source of listening anxiety. Further, in her study of sources of EFL listening anxiety in university students in a classroom context, Chang (2008) found that testing was the main source of listening anxiety – a finding that should be accounted for in educational contexts where listening is influenced by examination requirements.

3.5.3 Listening self-concept

Given the difficulties faced by students when listening, it is important that they persevere with it – in other words, that they have "motivational maintenance" (Dörnyei and Ottó, 1998). One key aspect contributing to motivational maintenance is learners' beliefs about themselves as learners, or self-beliefs. As discussed above, learners' negative self-beliefs about their ability to listen can be sources of listening anxiety; as I show in this section, they can impact language learning and listening in various other ways.

Self-beliefs related to language learning have been investigated through different constructs, such as *self-esteem*, *self-concept* and *self-efficacy*. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly the differences among these terms, which has resulted in difficulties comparing findings. Self-esteem is defined by Harter (2012, pp. 22-24) as "the overall evaluation of one's worth or value as a person". As my study focused on EFL listening specifically, this construct was deemed too broad. Self-efficacy was instead initially considered a valid alternative, as it is concerned with the belief in one's ability to accomplish a task (Bandura, 1993) and some evidence already exists showing the positive relationship between self-efficacy and listening. For instance, Chen's (2007) study of Taiwanese college students of English found that listening self-efficacy strongly predicted listening scores and Mills et al. (2006) found a positive correlation between listening self-efficacy and listening proficiency (albeit only for female students).

As my research evolved, however, I concluded that *self-concept* would a better framework of analysis. Self-concept is "a self-description judgement that includes an evaluation of competence and the feelings of self-worth associated with the judgement in question" (Pajares and Schunk, 2005, p. 105) in a specific domain. As Mercer (2011) argues in her extensive work on self-belief constructs, self-concept is thus a broader concept than self-efficacy, encompassing self-efficacy, cognitive and affective beliefs, and person knowledge – which is also one of the components of metacognitive knowledge in Goh (2002). Self-concept will be adopted in this research because, unlike self-efficacy, which is concerned only with future aspects of confidence (i.e. how confident students are that they can potentially perform tasks), it is a broader yet domain-focused construct, thus better capturing the different time dimensions and expressions used by teachers and learners when talking about aspects of self-concept. Further, self-efficacy is both domain- and context-specific, while self-concept is only domain-specific: although EFL listening is a narrow enough domain, by adopting the self-concept perspective, students can evaluate their confidence in different listening situations (e.g. listening to different sources, at home/in class, for tests). Finally, self-concept contains an affective dimension and one of its antecedents consists of attributional beliefs (see next section), which have also been studied in the present research.

Self-concept beliefs are important for listening development, leading to higher achievement, willingness to persevere and invest effort (Mills et al., 2006). In Rahimi and Abedini (2009), statistically significant differences were found in the listening achievement across the EFL students with high self-efficacy and those with low self-efficacy, suggesting that a strong relationship exists between

learners' beliefs in their ability to listen and their actual achievements in listening. This is especially important when it comes to classroom practice, as self-concept might be particularly low in a skill such as listening, which is less observable and controllable than other aspects of language learning (Graham et al., 2011), and potentially hindered by teaching approaches that test the skill rather than develop it.

3.5.4 Attributions

Self-concept is linked to another key aspect of listening, attributions. Based on Weiner (1986), attributions are the causes to which learners attribute their successes and failures. After experiencing positive or negative emotions following positive or negative outcomes, learners engage in causal searches to determine the reasons for these outcomes. These reasons have been categorised based on three causal dimensions: *locus,* indicating whether the reason is internal or external to the student; *stability,* explaining whether the cause is constant or varying in time; and *controllability*, related to the degree of control learners can exert over the cause (Graham and Taylor, 2014). Controllable and internal attributions, such as effort and strategies, tend to be associated with positive self-beliefs and success in foreign language learning: for example, in their study of attributions and self-efficacy in Korean ninth-grade EFL learners, Hsieh and Kang (2010) found that successful learners attributed their successes to internal and personal factors more than unsuccessful learners did.

With regards to listening specifically, which may be perceived as less "controllable" than other skills, attributions may be especially important. In their examination of strategy use and beliefs about listening difficulties, Namaziandost et al. (2019) claim that

> *there appears to be a tendency for most learners to falsely assume or blame their listening difficulties on external factors of text or task, rather than internal factors such as learners' anxiety, background knowledge, language proficiency or their ways of processing listening. (p.4)*

Similarly, in her study of secondary school learners of French as a foreign language, Graham (2006) found that most students felt less successful at listening than at other skills and attributed their lack of success to uncontrollable causes, such as the difficulty of the tasks and their supposed low ability (construed as a fixed, innate ability).

Attributions are not simply isolated cognitive appraisals in learners' minds but can play an important role in the classroom. Regarding listening specifically, two

observations should be made. First, teachers and teaching can impact attributions, positively – as shown by studies on attribution retraining, e.g. Erten (2015) – and negatively. One of the main antecedents of attributional beliefs is indeed feedback from teachers, who can indirectly and unknowingly convey low ability cues: for example, offering praise following success, especially at a relatively easy task, can unintentionally convey to the student the idea that they are low-ability students (Graham and Taylor, 2014). Further, holding lower expectations of students perceived to be less capable can lead teachers to deal with them less optimistically, ultimately affecting the students' self-concept and motivation (Dewey, 2004). This may be a situation worth exploring if previous findings from various contexts, suggesting that listening is simplified and highly scaffolded by teachers (Santos and Graham, 2018), also apply to the school context under investigation. Secondly, if product-oriented approaches to listening instruction overemphasising testing are indeed still widespread and applicable to the context at hand, this is not only unlikely to boost self-concept, but a focus on "right answers" may validate and reinforce learners' maladaptive attributional beliefs that their failures depend on uncontrollable factors. This is particularly relevant if teachers are not aware of the types of tasks with which learners struggle. In Wang, L. and Fan's (2015) research on learners' and teachers' perceptions of listening difficulties, the most striking difference related to task variables, as students and teachers rated the difficulty of blank-filling and multiple-choice tasks in exactly the opposite manner.

3.6 Teacher and learner beliefs

Some studies in language education have simultaneously investigated learners' and teachers' beliefs about language learning and teaching. While some found them to be aligned (Valeo and Spada, 2016; Pan and Block, 2011; Levine, 2003; Brosh, 1996), a substantial amount of research shows mismatches in teacher/learner beliefs (Brown, A.V., 2009; Hawkey, 2006; Jing, 2006; Schulz, 2001). A common finding across studies has been that learners tend to be more focused on error correction, grammatical accuracy and vocabulary learning than teachers, who appear to adhere to a more communicative approach (Hu and Tian, 2012). However, there is a dearth of research simultaneously investigating teachers' and learners' beliefs about listening: other than Wang, L. and Fan (2015), my review uncovered no such study. Table 3.3 summarises the key features of the main studies investigating learners' and teachers' beliefs simultaneously, showing the findings relevant to the comparison between the two sets of beliefs.

Table 3.3: Overview of studies involving both teachers and learners

Study	Objective	Context	Methods	Participants	Key findings
Valeo and Spada (2016)	To compare teachers' and learners' views on isolated and integrated focus-on-form instruction	Colleges and universities in Canada and Brazil	Teacher and learner questionnaires	100 teachers, 469 learners	Both learners and teachers prefer integrated over isolated focus-on-form.
Sadeghi and Abdi (2015)	To identify and compare teachers' and learners' beliefs about language learning	Language institutes in Iran	Horwitz's (1985) BALLI questionnaire	80 teachers, 100 students	Significant differences exist between teachers' and learners' beliefs.
Cephe and Yalcin (2015)	To investigate whether teachers' beliefs and practices influence learners' beliefs and whether teachers' and learners' beliefs overlap over time	A school in Turkey	Horwitz's (1985) BALLI questionnaire, teacher and student interviews	33 teachers, 620 students	Significant changes in learner beliefs from pre- to post-test are taken by the authors to indicate that teacher influenced this change (though it is unclear how this determination about causation was made). Mean scores of teachers and learners are closer in post-test than pre-test.
Wang, L. and Fan (2015)	To compare teachers' and learners' perceptions of the sources of listening difficulties experienced by low-proficiency Chinese learners	Universities in China	Teacher and learner questionnaires; semi-structured interviews	30 teachers, 131 low-proficiency learners	Teachers and learners concur that text and processing related are the key sources of difficulty; students and teachers hold opposing beliefs about task variables.
Hu and Tian (2012)	To identify and compare learners' and teachers' beliefs about strategies for learning and teaching Chinese Tones and their reported strategies	Universities in the UK	Teacher and learner questionnaires	15 teachers, 60 students	Teachers and learners hold different beliefs about the effectiveness of tone learning and teaching strategies. Students value strategies more than teachers.
Wan et al. (2011)	To examine the effects of metaphor analysis concerning beliefs about classroom teachers' roles between teachers and students	A university in China	Theory-based support workshop; metaphor elicitation task; interviews	35 teachers, 70 students	Teachers and students hold different beliefs about the interpretation of the teacher as instructor, cultural transmitter, interest arouser, authority and co-worker.
Brown, A.V. (2009)	To identify and compare teachers' and learners' ideals of effective teaching	A university in the USA	Learner and teacher questionnaire	49 teachers, 1,600 students	Teachers believe in the value of communicative teaching more than learners, who believe in the importance of formal grammar instruction.

					Teachers believe less in the importance of error correction than their students do.
Polat (2009)	To identify convergence in beliefs held by students and teachers and relationships among beliefs and achievement	Two schools in Georgia	Semi-structured interviews; document analyses; questionnaires	30 teachers, 40 students	Teachers and learners both believe in the importance of grammar teaching and in traditional ways of learning and teaching grammar. Results are inconclusive regarding the relationship between teachers' and learners' belief convergence and students' language achievement.
Riley (2009)	To investigate shifts in students' beliefs over nine months and identify the extent to which teacher beliefs influence these shifts	A university in Japan	Teacher questionnaire, learner questionnaire,	34 teachers, 661 students	Students' beliefs change over time. In 71% of cases, these changes are in the direction of teachers' beliefs.
Bloom (2007)	To explore the tensions emerging between teacher and learners when negotiating the curriculum	A university in the USA	Anecdotal records; video-taped classes; student interviews; student- and teacher-generated documents	1 teacher, 13 students	Some students believe in a teacher-centred, traditional classroom more than the teacher. Some students place more importance on accuracy than communication than the teacher does.
Dewey (2004)	To identify the extent to which teacher attitudes toward two different teaching strategies (immediate and delayed introduction to Japanese writing) influence learners' attitudes	Two universities in Japan	Teacher questionnaire, learner questionnaire, teacher essays, learner and teacher interviews	2 teachers, 122 students	Students in the two groups express positive attitudes toward the instructional strategies implemented by their teacher.
Schulz (2001)	To elicit and compare American and Colombian teachers' and students' perceptions on explicit grammar study and error correction and compare perspectives in the US and Colombia	8 universities in Colombia, one in the USA	Learner and teacher questionnaire	214 teachers, 1431 students	More teachers than learners believe in the importance of grammar study. Students in both countries express much stronger beliefs in the value of corrective feedback than teachers do.

In terms of the theoretical rationale for conducting studies on both teacher and learner beliefs, Pinto Silva (2004) and Schulz (2001) argue that an issue with much research is that it is founded on the assumption that mismatches should be identified and addressed because sizeable divergences are detrimental to learning. On the one hand, there seems to be evidence that when teachers and learners hold contrasting beliefs, this can have an indirect impact on learning, for example in the form of tensions (Bloom, 2007), reduced learners' willingness to participate in classroom activities (Sadeghi and Abdi, 2015), lower teacher credibility (Schulz, 2001), learner resistance to teaching innovations (Jing, 2006) and misinterpretation of teachers' messages and intentions (Barcelos, 2000). On the other hand, studies such as Polat (2009), attempting to find a direct link between these divergences and student achievement have been inconclusive. Consequently, while the indirect repercussions described above are important (and in fact one of the topics of this research), studies advocating an alignment between teacher and learners as a requisite for learning have not suggested how this alignment may be reached in practice, aside from recommending that teachers explain the rationales behind their practices. Therefore, the present research investigates teachers' and learners' beliefs based on the following assumptions:

1) Teacher and learner beliefs have different origins, given teachers' and learners' different profiles and experiences. Furthermore, beliefs about different topics are held at different levels of specificity (e.g. teachers will have more informed and ingrained beliefs about aspects of teaching); therefore, the existence of divergences in beliefs is to be expected.

2) In terms of the influence of teachers on learners' beliefs, I posit that how learners interpret classroom practices influences their learning, sometimes negatively. In his review of listening and captioned videos, Yeldham (2018) suggests that learner beliefs about the purpose of listening activities may shape their listening behaviour (e.g. learners who believe the purpose is learning vocabulary may focus disproportionately on understanding words at the expense of general meaning). Furthermore, some studies suggest that teachers' preferences and instructional practices may exert an influence over learners' own beliefs and actions. In his experimental study comparing teachers' and learners' attitudes regarding immediate and delayed use of romanised Japanese in language learning, Dewey (2004) found that learners in two classes (each of which applied one of the techniques) supported their teacher's choices and adapted their learning strategies accordingly. Riley (2009) compared university teachers' and learners' beliefs over nine months: in 71% of cases, learners' beliefs changed in the direction

of teachers' beliefs. While it may be difficult to identify with certainty a causality link between teachers' actions and beliefs and learners' beliefs (as changes in learner beliefs may be a result of a number of factors), these findings seem to suggest that "if [teachers'] own attitudes and actions influence students' attitudes, [they] may be indirectly affecting their learning strategies and their language development" (Riley, 2009, p. 574). Consequently, the present research investigates how the learners' interpretations of their teachers' instructional practices and underlying beliefs may have impacted their own beliefs and ultimately the way they approached listening tasks.

3) Although some research suggests that teachers and learners exert a reciprocal influence on each other's beliefs (Kalaja et al., 2018), the role of learners in influencing teachers' beliefs has been somewhat overlooked in comparative studies (Wan et al., 2011). Accumulated experience of what works with learners is a key source of teacher beliefs (Levin, 2015) and teachers may subordinate their beliefs about language learning and effective teaching to their beliefs about learners. In Phipps and Borg (2009), tensions among teachers' beliefs arose when teachers' beliefs were contrary to what teachers perceived as being their learners' expectations and motivational needs. For example, despite not believing sentence-level grammar practice to be beneficial, teachers still did it in the classroom to meet what they thought were the learners' expectations. The present study thus sought to investigate the role of learners in the teachers' belief systems, the impact of beliefs about learners on their practices and the extent to which teachers' beliefs about learners overrode other beliefs.

3.7 Summary

This chapter has reviewed the literature from the three main fields on which I draw in this research: listening instruction, teacher beliefs and learner beliefs.

First, I reviewed the relevant literature on listening. Listening is understood to be a complex, active process involving directions of processing, metacognition, sources of knowledge and, crucially for L2 learners, compensatory strategies. In spite of expertise-based, process-oriented models to listening instruction receiving relative acceptance in the academic community, the extent to which these practices have permeated to classrooms is far from clear, as research into teachers' beliefs about listening reveals rather traditional beliefs held in various contexts, with listening often viewed as a subordinate skill.

I have then shown how the study of teacher beliefs, and especially of language teacher beliefs, has evolved and embraced the situated nature of teachers'

mental lives. Having acknowledged criticisms to the uncritical uptake of concepts such as beliefs and knowledge, I have discussed how I problematise and conceptualise the construct of language teacher beliefs in this research, moving towards a more layered understanding of beliefs (also reflected in my methodological decisions, described in the following chapter) and of the belief-practice relationship. This accounts for contextual factors and beliefs about these contextual factors. I subsequently reviewed how language learner beliefs have also come to be understood as embedded in contexts and investigated through diverse methods. I have clarified the definition of learner beliefs that I have adopted in this study, the importance of the affective dimension of learners' beliefs and their potential relationships to learners' practices (more specifically, their approaches to listening tasks).

I articulated my rationale for including both teachers' and learners' beliefs in this study. Although I acknowledge the potential repercussions of mismatches between teachers' and learners' beliefs, my reasons for studying them simultaneously extend further, including attempting to understand how learners' beliefs *about classroom practices* influence their learning and the extent to which teachers' beliefs about learners may play a role in defining their practices, possibly superseding other teachers' beliefs and contextual factors.

It is clear that a paucity of studies exist that simultaneously define, problematise and contextualise beliefs and practices, drawing not only on self-reports but on observation, that focus on listening and that do so with reference to both teachers and learners. This is a gap that the present study seeks to address to advance our understanding of how listening is taught and learned and why, and how these two dimensions influence each other.

In the next chapter, I present the methodological framework of this study, detailing my rationales regarding data collection and data analysis in light of the literature and the theoretical framework elaborated in this chapter.

Chapter 4 Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology of this research. After detailing my research questions, I discuss my research stance, its philosophical underpinnings in terms of ontology and epistemology, and the case study approach used. I then move onto to examine the study's sampling, ethical considerations, data collection procedures and data analysis. Finally, I provide an overview of the strategies employed to enhance the quality of the research.

4.1 Research questions

Based on the constructs of teacher and learner beliefs defined in Chapter 3, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do teachers of English in an Italian secondary school teach listening?
2. How do they explain their approach to teaching listening with reference to their beliefs and other factors?
3. What are the beliefs held by learners in an Italian secondary school about listening in English as a foreign language?
4. What are their listening practices?
5. What is the relationship between the teachers' practices and explanations and the learners' beliefs and practices?
   5a To what extent are they aligned?
   5b What are the implications of this alignment?

The structure of these questions reflects the theoretical and methodological background of the research. Indeed, question 1 begins by considering teaching practice as observed and reported in interviews and is followed by question 2 on teachers' explanations (including both beliefs and references to contextual factors) given by teachers in interviews. This mirrors my operationalisation of beliefs as explanations given by teachers for their practices. Questions 3 and 4 aim to capture the learners' beliefs and reported listening practices as gleaned from questionnaires and interviews. Finally, question 5 and its sub-questions explore the interactive dimension of this study, juxtaposing teacher and learner data.

4.2 Research stance

As argued in Chapter 3, this study explores the situated understanding that teachers and learners have of listening in English as a foreign language. This approach informed decisions about the ontology, epistemology and methodology of the research.

Ontology refers to one's beliefs about the nature of reality. This study subscribes to an interpretive, constructivist view of reality, contending that events are interpreted differently by different individuals and reality is socially constructed (Arthur et al., 2012). The study is thus based on a relativist ontology, refuting the positivistic view that one objective reality exists and embracing the idea that there are multiple, subjective, context-dependent realities (Richards, K., 2003). Therefore, beliefs of teachers and learners are conceived of as the meanings that they attach to their experiences related to listening, allowing for the possibility that the same listening event (e.g. a listening activity in a specific class) may be experienced differently by different individuals.

The interpretivist, constructivist framework also informs the epistemology of this research. Epistemology refers to "the very bases of knowledge – its nature and forms, how it can be acquired, and how communicated to other human beings" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 7). Interpretive research sees knowledge as constructed in the interaction between the individual and the environment and thus seeks to understand the meanings attached to experiences and actions by individuals, collectively or individually, in specific socio-historical contexts. Knowledge is thus subjectively defined and context-bound (Merriam, 2009) and is researched from an emic viewpoint: in this study, I investigated EFL listening, the phenomenon at hand, through the perceptions of the participants. This has implications for my role as a researcher: far from claiming objectivity, I acknowledge that I was involved in co-constructing meaning with the participants, implying also that the research reflects to a certain extent my values and assumptions. Acknowledging that this is a feature of social research, I monitored the impact of such values and assumptions and strengthen the study's trustworthiness (section 4.8). To this end, I endeavour to provide clarity around the methodological procedures used, how my positionality influenced the research process and how I monitored this.

4.3 Case study approach

In line with the interpretivist, constructivist, emic perspective presented above, I decided to adopt a case study methodology. A case study is "an exploration of a 'bounded system' or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). Case studies produce rich data and thick descriptions of phenomena aimed at reaching an "understanding of individuals' experiences, issues, insights, developmental pathways, or performance within a particular linguistic, social, or educational context" (Duff, 2014, p. 233).

In education, a "case" is normally a person (e.g. a learner), or an entity, such as a classroom, school or programme (Dörnyei, 2007). This research is a multiple case study investigating four cases, each of which corresponds to one teacher and a class of approximately twenty learners. The rationale behind these choices is discussed in 4.4.

The choice of this methodology was motivated by some of the key features of case studies: *contextualisation, boundedness* and *triangulation* (Merriam, 2009). Contextualisation refers to the study of phenomena (beliefs and practice related to listening, in this case) in naturalistic, unique and dynamic contexts. Whether the researcher's presence ever allows for a context to be entirely naturalistic is questionable, as discussed below; however, this research acknowledges the paramount role of the classroom, school and wider social context in influencing beliefs and practice. Further, contextualisation is an important feature in naturalistic research, to study the practices of teachers and learners in their natural environment. Boundedness refers to case studies having clearly defined boundaries (Nunan and Bailey, 2009). The present study is bound by time (as per the timeline in 4.5), space (the school involved) and participants. Finally, triangulation in case studies means using different data collection methods and data sources: in this study, observations, interviews, questionnaires and documents collected from teachers and students are triangulated to gain a more robust understanding of their beliefs and practices (Hamilton, 2011).

Case studies have been categorised differently by various scholars. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) categorise them as historical (investigating a phenomenon over time), observational (whereby the main data collection tool is observation of a phenomenon) and life histories (collecting narratives). Stake (2006) distinguishes between intrinsic case studies (motivated by intrinsic interest in specific cases), instrumental case studies (to provide insight to build theory) and collective case studies (whereby multiple cases are studied with a view to comparing them and gaining more thorough understanding). Finally, based on Yin (2014), case studies can be explanatory (testing existing theories), descriptive (aiming to describe a phenomenon), exploratory (exploring phenomena to derive interpretation and theories) and multiple, similar to collective case studies in Stake (2006). Based on these definitions, the present study is:

- **Observational**, since beliefs are elicited in relation to observed classroom practice, a core part of this study;

- **Collective**, as it brings together four cases to identify patterns, differences and intersections between teachers' and learners' beliefs and practices both within and across cases;
- **Exploratory**, as it aims to explore beliefs and practices regarding listening without a specific hypothesis to test (albeit with some initial theory informing the design of the data collection instruments), with the flexibility needed to develop interpretations and theory as a result of the research process (Swanborn, 2010);
- **Instrumental**, as the cases examined facilitate insights into the topic of listening-related beliefs and practices.

Case studies present limitations. One relates to generalisability, that is, whether results can be applied to larger populations given the focus on the in-depth understanding of the particular (Hamilton, 2011). Some scholars acknowledge the importance of generalising case study results from the instance at hand to the class of instances they represent: thus, a single-sex school might effectively represent characteristics of other single-sex schools in a given area (Cohen et al., 2007; Yin, 2003). Others have claimed that generalisability is too strongly connected to positivism and it is thus irrelevant or unachievable in an interpretive paradigm (Schofield, 2002). Given its predominantly qualitative orientation, this study makes no claims of generalisability in the statistical sense, but rather focuses on analytical generalisability, whereby the research expands and generalises to theory rather than populations. In this sense, this study espouses Ruddin's (2006) position, arguing that a distinction is to be made between case inference (i.e. imposing a theoretical construction "onto" a case) and statistical inference, typical of quantitative research. This study is also aligned with Stake's (1982) notion of *naturalistic generalisation*, shifting the responsibility for generalising findings to other cases from the researcher to the reader, as it provides readers with evidence that the findings could be applied to other contexts without making this claim on the readers' behalf. This notion underpins the position argued by Lincoln and Guba (1985) that rigour in qualitative research is attained by aiming for *trustworthiness* rather than reliability and validity in the conventionally quantitative sense. Trustworthiness includes the four criteria of *credibility* (the extent to which researchers' interpretations reflect participants' own views), *transferability* (the degree to which findings can be applied to other contexts), *confirmability* (the extent to which findings would be confirmed by other researchers) and *dependability* (concerned with the stability of findings over time). Multiple strategies were employed in this study to fulfil these criteria, as discussed in 4.8.

Another drawback of case studies is that they may generate large amounts of data and thick descriptions potentially producing "an endless series of low-level banal and tedious illustrations that take over from in-depth, rigorous analysis" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 254). Hence, case studies need to balance description with the elaboration of emergent themes and links to theory (Duff, 2008; Nisbet and Watt, 1984). I have thus provided four findings chapters, a cross-case analysis chapter and a discussion in which some level of description is integrated with the examination of key themes, emerging with progressively more clarity in the cross-case analysis and discussion chapters, where they are connected to interpretations, previous research and theorisation.

Finally, subjectivity may be a danger of case studies because, in attempting to gather in-depth data, researchers may ultimately identify with their participants or let their unanalysed preconceptions influence what they report. While researchers in naturalistic case studies are likely to be close to their data and participants, it could be argued that not only is personal judgement fundamentally involved in all research (e.g. in making connections to literature), but also that interpretive case study research is valuable precisely because the involvement of the researcher enables them to portray the case under study convincingly (Nunan and Bailey, 2009). Furthermore, researchers can assuage these concerns by detailing their decision-making, coding and analysis and reflecting on their sampling choices and positionality (Duff, 2008), the topics of the following section.

4.4 Sampling

Following Borg's (2012) recommendations in his methodological analysis of language teacher cognition studies, this study seeks to offer clarity on the rationale behind the selection of the participants. This study used purposive sampling, a common strategy in qualitative and case study research in which participants are selected because they belong to a specific group within the target population (Patton, 1990). The participants in this research are four EFL teachers and a third- or fourth-year class of *liceo* students per teacher involved, totalling 84 students. The rationale behind purposive sampling is what Patton (1990) describes as "typical case": all teachers had at least twenty years of experience and worked in a state school. These two criteria reflect the status of the majority of Italian teachers (OECD, 2019); thus, although no claims are made that this sample is statistically representative of EFL state school teachers in Italy, the teacher participants reflected some typical characteristics of the target population. This was important because, while this study does not aim for statistical generalisability, it does aim for transferability, and recruiting

teachers with typical features increases the chances that the implications of this research may be transferrable to similar contexts.

Each case was defined as one teacher and one group of learners because students in Italy are grouped in classes of twenty to thirty learners and take all their lessons with the same group, regardless of level, for the whole duration of upper secondary school. Classes thus develop their own classroom dynamics and interpersonal relationships through continued contact among students and with each of their teachers: it thus seemed that the best way to investigate beliefs and practices would be to do it with reference to a relatively stable bounded system, to which all the participants could refer with ease and clarity. Further, considering that learners likely had never been interviewed about listening in English, keeping a focus on one teacher with which they had had experience kept their discussion and questionnaire answers focused on the specific topic at hand. Each teacher was asked to select a third- or fourth-year *liceo* class with which they felt comfortable participating in the study. This might have caused teachers to choose especially well-behaved or academically stronger classes, thus giving me insight into potentially atypical classroom environments. Nevertheless, giving teachers this choice was the only possible option, especially to help them feel comfortable with an observer in their lessons, and with recording and filming. Finally, third- and fourth-year classes were selected because pupils would be aged sixteen to eighteen, thus better able to articulate their views than younger students. Further, English literature is commonly introduced for one to two hours per week in third- and fourth-year classes, leaving at least one weekly hour for language classes; this changes in the fifth year, where language is commonly replaced by the study of literature.

4.4.1 Recruitment and access

In addition to purposive sampling, this research also included elements of convenience and snowball sampling. In convenience sampling, participants are selected by virtue of being readily available and accessible to the researcher (Bryman, 2016). As I initially had no personal relationship with any of the participants, I approached them through mutual acquaintances. This connection worked aided me in obtaining and maintaining access. I initially contacted a teacher in a *liceo* in Lombardy and one in Emilia Romagna, in Northern Italy. I emailed them the information sheet (Appendix 1) and, in late May 2018, we spoke in person about their and their learners' involvement in the study and clarified their doubts about the research procedures, timeline and student involvement. They confirmed that they wished to take part in the research. In September 2018, however, the Lombardy teacher learned that she would only

be teaching first, second- and fifth-year classes in that academic year and therefore had to withdraw.

With regards to the Emilia Romagna teacher, snowball sampling worked as an effective strategy to recruit additional participants. In this approach, researchers make contact with potential participants who in turn identify and put the researcher in contact with other participants (Bryman, 2016). The first teacher initially approached four of her colleagues who fulfilled the two demographic criteria (minimum twenty years of experience and working in state schools) and who she thought might be interested in contributing. She sent them the information sheet and they agreed to have a phone call with me to discuss further. I subsequently phoned them and discussed their involvement in the project. All of them confirmed their interest and that the school director was also generally keen on participating in research. Another frequent theme of discussion was the safeguarding of their students throughout the study, which we discussed with reference to the ethics provision detailed in section 4.5. Finally, when five of them agreed to participate and confirmed in September 2018 that they had one third- or fourth-year class to involve in the study, I sent the school director an information sheet and subsequently met with him to discuss the project in person. He asked me further questions and signed the consent form.

Since attrition was one of the risks in this research, the number of cases was originally set to six in accordance with advice in the literature (Creswell, 2013). Nevertheless, the Lombardy teacher withdrew right before data collection started; further, one of the teachers in Emilia Romagna and her class participated in the study, but their data could not be used in the data analysis. This was due to the fact that we struggled to identify a clear-cut line between literature and language classes: when I asked her whether I could observe language classes, she initially let me observe a lesson I would describe as a language class, but later, the classes I was allowed to observe focused on the study of English literature. When I started to analyse the data, I realised that listening was only a small and sometimes absent part of these observations, so it would be difficult to justify their inclusion in the study and draw comparisons with the other cases in the cross-case analysis. Although this poses an ethical dilemma because it might be regarded as a "waste" of her and her students' time, I openly explained to the teacher the reasons why I had decided to discard her data, which she understood. She still participated in the final meetings, presentation and workshop that we had in October 2019 to discuss the study's preliminary findings and how they related to the teaching of listening. She reported finding her participation in the research valuable.

Overall, then, the data elicited from four teachers and 84 students were used in this study. Pseudonyms were used for all participants to protect their anonymity (see section 4.5). Since the teacher participants were one male and three females, in order to ensure that the male teacher would not be immediately identifiable, all teachers are described in this thesis as females. This measure was feasible because gender was not an important variable in this study. The characteristics of the participants are summarised below:

Table 4.1: Characteristics of participants

Teacher	Qualification	Pedagogical training	Teaching experience (years)	Class (year)	Type of *liceo*	Number of students
Maria	MA Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures	• In-service mentoring • In-service workshops	35	3rd	*Scientifico*	20
Giulia	MA Pedagogy and Modern Foreign Languages	• Pre-service MA • In-service workshops	35	4th	*Classico*	22
Teresa	MA Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures	• In-service workshops • In-service Erasmus+ events	30	3rd	*Scientifico*	19
Amalia	MA Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures	• In-service workshops	25	4th	*Linguistico*	23

4.4.2 Positionality

One of the dangers in case studies is connected to the researcher's positionality, including the biases, values and assumptions that they bring to the research (Sikes, 2004). While this research embraces the legitimacy of the subjective nature of interpretation in case study research, it also endeavours to practise reflexivity, described by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018) as careful interpretation and reflection. This process involves continued self-awareness of one's theoretical assumptions and values, self-exploration, questioning of how data are interpreted and reflection of the roles of the researcher and, more broadly, social, cultural and linguistic traditions.

To offer clarity around this, it is firstly necessary to acknowledge that, as Trowler (2011) suggests, it is a fallacy to think of a qualitative researcher's position as exclusively that of an outsider or an insider. Indeed, I was initially

both an outsider, having studied to be a teacher in the UK and never worked in an Italian state school, and an insider, as I shared the participants' first language, schooling, cultural background and knowledge of the school and wider social context. When the research started, I defined myself mostly as an observer, but as the research progressed, I became an *observer-as-participant* (Gold, 1958): I was an individual known to the participants as a researcher but through a fairly informal relationship. As the research went on, I developed a good rapport with all the teacher participants, to the extent that from February 2019, I became involved in some of the school's activities (e.g. career days) and my communications with the teachers intensified, at times for reasons unrelated to the study (for example, to exchange lesson ideas and discuss future Erasmus+ projects). I thus became more of an insider.

On the one hand, this rapport and trust helped me gain insights into the teachers' beliefs, of which they spoke openly; further, as the teachers developed trust in me, even the ones who initially opted for only audio recording in classroom observations became comfortable enough to allow video recording, which enhanced the depth of the observational data. As I speak the participants' first language, I could also conduct all interviews in Italian, thus allowing learners especially to express themselves naturally. Simultaneously, retaining somewhat of an outsider position allowed me to identify and probe further into aspects that might have otherwise been overlooked or taken for granted (Atkins and Wallace, 2012), especially in relation to the contextual factors that seemed so tacitly clear to the teachers (for instance, the flexibility in syllabus design and low teacher accountability).

My positionality also presented some challenges. Firstly, I may have underestimated the importance of issues that appeared clear to me due to my familiarity with the context. However, throughout the research I tried to check my assumptions against other contexts with which I was familiar and with my supervisors' views. For instance, I realised that I had to probe further into and explain more clearly how pre- and in-service teacher education worked. Furthermore, having been trained as a teacher in the UK and having learned languages through what I now understand to be vastly grammar-translation-oriented methods in Italy, I had to acknowledge my tacit negative assumptions about the school system. By retaining a high level of awareness of these assumptions (Greenbank, 2013), I soon realised that they influenced me in the first iteration of data analysis, where I questioned the theoretical and pedagogical validity of teachers' classroom practices in my memos. Since classroom observation was aimed primarily at describing the teachers' practices, rather than evaluating them, I returned to said data and re-analysed

them trying to leave out any evaluation. This iterative analysis ensured that findings and conclusions would be grounded in evidence and not be unduly influenced by value judgements (thus enhancing confirmability, as per 4.8.3).

4.5 Ethics

Several issues were considered before starting the data collection to ensure the ethical treatment of all participants in the research, leading to receiving ethical approval from the AREA Faculty Research Ethics Committee (Appendix 3). Table 4.2 summarises the main ethical issues and measures to tackle them:

Table 4.2: Ethical issues

Ethical issue	Description	Measures to tackle it
Informed consent	Participants must be as fully informed as possible about the study, understand what their participation entails and give their consent voluntarily (Rallis and Rossman, 2009).	-Teachers, the school principal, learners and under-age learners' parents received different versions of information sheets (sample in Appendix 1) describing the study and their right to withdraw; -subsequently, participants were asked to sign and date individual consent forms (Appendix 2);
Vulnerable participants	Learners aged 16-18 (including under-age children per Italian and UK law) were involved in the study.	-I obtained a DBS check, an Italian police check and signed declarations from each school involved that such documents suffice to work with minors; -research objectives and participation were explained clearly to learners with plain language; -written parental consent was obtained for minors.
Confidentiality	Participants' identities should be protected and they should not be identifiable – not only as a matter of ethics but also to help them express their views freely (Dörnyei, 2007).	-Pseudonyms were used for all participants; -the only male teacher participant was referred to with a female name to reduce the potential for identification; -identifying information (e.g. names, places, ages) were either eliminated or modified.
Data protection	Data should be securely stored and not kept for longer than necessary (Bryman, 2016)	-Hard copy data were first stored in a locked cabinet, then digitalised and destroyed; -electronic data were safely stored in a folder encrypted with the University of Leeds encryption software; -the data will only be kept for three years after the end of data collection.

4.6 Data collection

This study employed multiple data collection tools, as is typical of case studies, to provide in-depth data on beliefs and practices related to listening. This facilitated methodological triangulation (Cohen et al., 2007), one of the aspects of this study that enhanced its trustworthiness. The data collection instruments used in this research are summarised below:

Table 4.3: Overview of data collection instruments

Instrument	Purpose	Related research question
Classroom observations	- To observe teaching practice related to listening - To identify patterns in teaching practices and excerpts for video-stimulated recall interviews - To observe learners' behaviour in class	RQ 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 5a, 5b
Teacher interviews	- To gain insights into the teachers' backgrounds - To elicit teachers' explanations (including beliefs and references to context) for their teaching practices	RQ 1, 2, 5, 5a, 5b
Learner questionnaire	- To elicit the beliefs and practices related to listening of all the learners - To identify learners for subsequent interviews	RQ 3, 5, 5a, 5b
Learner interviews	- To explore in more detail issues covered in the learner questionnaire	RQ 3, 4, 5, 5a, 5b
Document analysis	- To collect information about the educational context of the research - To explore the roles of syllabi, teaching materials and assessment in the teachers' beliefs and practices	RQ 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 5a, 5b

As is clear from the table and as discussed in Chapter 3, the main focus of this study is on teaching, hence the higher amount of data regarding teachers compared to learners. Albeit through a comparatively smaller amount of data, learners' perspectives are also incorporated to gain more comprehensive understanding of listening in this context.

After piloting the data collection instruments (see following section), the data were collected in four phases, from 16 October 2018 to 5 April 2019, with a final fifth phase in October 2019 for member validation and teacher workshops. The timeline is summarised in Figure 4.1:

Phase 1: 16-18 October 2018
- Classroom observation 1 (1 per teacher)
- Teacher background interview (1 per teacher)
- Learner questionnaire (84 learners)

Data analysis Period 1: 19 October-5 November 2018
Transcription and data analysis

Phase 2: 5-15 November 2018
- Classroom observation 2 (1 per teacher)
- Teacher post-observation interview (1 per teacher)
- Learner interviews (1 per 12 learners)
- Collection of documents

Data analysis Period 2: 16 November 2018-13 January 2019
Transcription and data analysis

Phase 3: 14-17 January 2019
- Classroom observation 3 (1 per teacher)
- Video-stimulated recall interview (1 per teacher)

Data analysis Period 3: 18 January-31 March 2019
Transcription and data analysis

Phase 4: 1-5 April 2019
- Classroom observation 4 (1 per teacher)
- Video-stimulated recall interview (1 per teacher)
- Learner interviews (1 per 12 learners)

Data analysis Period 4: 5 April-13 October 2019
Transcription and data analysis

Phase 5: 14-16 October 2019
- Member validation
- Group presentation and workshop

Figure 4.1: Data collection timeline

Spreading the data collection over a full academic year allowed for the prolonged engagement that Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue is necessary to establish rapport with participants and enhance credibility. Further, a progressive focusing approach was used, whereby

> *[...] beginning with an extensive database, the researchers systematically reduce the breadth of their enquiry to give more concentrated attention to the emerging issues. This 'progressive focusing' permits unique and unpredicted phenomena to be given due weight. It reduces the problem of data overload; and prevents the accumulation of a mass of unanalysed material. (Parlett and Hamilton, 1972, p. 160)*

Indeed, the transcription and data analysis conducted between phases served the purpose of zeroing in on the areas of listening most relevant to the participants; thus, the data analysis in each phase informed the data collection of the following phase.

4.6.1 Pilot

The data collection instruments were piloted from 11 to 21 September 2018 with sixteen third-year students aged sixteen and seventeen and one EFL teacher from a *liceo linguistico* in Lombardy. While the students in the pilot had similar demographic characteristics to the students in the study, the teacher was less experienced than the four teachers I subsequently worked with. He was still selected because our long-standing good relationship ensured honesty in his feedback and convenience of access.

I piloted the questionnaire, both in hard copy and online, through Online surveys (Jisc, 2020) and the learner interviews (two individual interviews and one group interview with three learners). Further, I conducted two classroom observations (and piloted a semi-structured observation sheet), a background teacher interview, a post-observation teacher interview and a video-stimulated recall teacher interview.

Aside from practice in my interview and observation skills, the pilot study led to the following changes:

- Questionnaire: after asking for the learners' feedback, I simplified and clarified the language of some items (e.g. I referred to the four skills without using the confusing word "skill"), added examples to clarify some items (e.g. in question 11, see Appendix 4) and deleted unclear options (e.g. in item 15, I deleted "I struggle to understand abstract concepts");

- Learner interviews: after piloting both individual and group interviews, I opted for individual interviews as they provided richer data and solved the issue of participants dominating the group sessions (Krueger, 1998);
- Video-stimulated recall (henceforth: VSR) interviews: based on the teacher's feedback, I realised that showing excerpts of video straightaway was too intimidating, so I designed interview protocols with introductory questions with no reference to the video. I also realised that more questions eliciting explanations for teaching practice, originally asked as why-questions, could be rephrased less intimidatingly as "can you tell me about this?". I also used the Italian *come mai* (roughly translated as "how come"), in an attempt to make why-questions less direct;
- Observation sheet: it initially included four columns (minute, teacher, learner and notes), but I eliminated the "learner" column as it was unnecessary and confusing while making notes.

4.6.2 Data collection instruments

This research employed classroom observations, teacher interviews, learner questionnaires, learner interviews and document analysis. This section discusses the rationale for each instrument and the data collection procedures.

4.6.3 Classroom observations

Since one of the most common issues with belief research is an over-reliance on reported practices (Borg, S., 2018), often found to differ from actual practice (Cohen et al., 2007), this study is also based on classroom observation. Nunan and Bailey (2009, p. 258) define classroom observation as "a family of related procedures for gathering data during actual language lessons or tutorial sessions, primarily by watching, listening and recording (rather than by asking)". Classroom observations were conducted for three main aims: observing teaching practice related to listening, identifying key excerpts for subsequent VSR interviews and observing learners' behaviour.

Classroom observation provides evidence of behaviour and it is complementary to methods that delve into the participants' ways of accounting for the behaviours observed, such as interviews. Observation provides live data from "naturally" occurring situations, it is sensitive to contexts and has strong ecological validity (Moyles, 2002), in line with case study methodology and the need to examine beliefs and practice in conjunction with contextual factors.

Two criteria are generally used to categorise classroom observations: structure and participation. As for the former, Cohen et al. (2007) describe a continuum

from structured observation (hypothesis-testing of categories of behaviour codified in observation schedules) to semi-structured (aimed at gathering data on an existing agenda in a more flexible and unsystematic fashion) to unstructured (hypothesis-generating, aimed at observing events before deciding on their significance for the study). Due to the exploratory nature of this study, beginning with some initial notions from the literature while allowing for key themes to emerge from the data, the observations were semi-structured. As evident in Appendix 5, the first page of the observation sheet collected some data about the class (date, teacher's name, duration) and about the listening activities (e.g. English varieties, approximate CEFR level of input, equipment used, task type), but left space in the following pages for my descriptive field notes, memos pointing to analytical insights and links with theory (Richards, K., 2003), and questions to explore further in subsequent VSR. The information sheet was slightly more structured in the first round of observations, with a column for my annotations on the teacher and one for other notes. However, I found this was not helpful as it was difficult to distinguish teacher-related notes from other reflections; therefore, I made the observation sheet more unstructured, eliminating the teacher column starting from Observations 2.

Regarding participation, the second criterion, my role related specifically to observation was of an *observer-as-participant* (Gold, 1958), as my main role was to observe, participating only peripherally. The researcher's role has implications in terms of one of the main dangers of classroom observation, the "observer's paradox" (Labov, 1978), whereby the presence of an observer exerts an influence, be it positive or negative, on the informants' behaviours, performances or attitudes. To tackle this, I discussed with teachers before the classes that I would sit at the back of the classroom, not intervene in the classes and only wished to observe how they normally taught. I also allowed participants to become used to my presence by spreading the observations across a relatively long period of time. A related potential drawback in observations was caused by video recording, which can influence the participants' behaviours (Baker and Lee, 2011). However, prior to the start of the research, the teachers commented that both their students and they were used to being recorded in class; further, I placed the recording equipment strategically on windowsills, where it was less likely to cause reactivity. Finally, I had individual discussions with teachers about how comfortable they felt with being filmed and agreed to introduce the camera as gradually as needed.

Each teacher was asked to identify four lessons in which they planned to teach listening, defined as explicit listening activities through audio, video and/or exercises rather than implicit listening (i.e. listening to teacher or classmates).

Four 50 to 55-minute classes per teacher were observed. I observed and took field notes as unobtrusively as possible from the back of the classroom, without intervening. In terms of recording, I aimed to film all the classes; however, after discussing this at the start of the study, I agreed with Maria and Amalia that we would begin with audio recording only and start filming if they became comfortable with the idea. I thus audio recorded their first two observations and videoed the last two. In all the observations in this study, I always used two recording devices just in case one might not work; thus, I used a tablet and a laptop to audio record Maria and Amalia's first classes, and a tablet for audio recording combined with a video camera with a tripod in all the other classes. This proved a useful strategy to make up for faulty equipment, as explained in 4.6.5.

4.6.4 Teacher interviews

Interviews are widely used tools in the elicitation of beliefs, a challenging endeavour due to their unobservable and often tacit nature (Le and Maley, 2012). Interviews can be more or less structured; midway along on this continuum are semi-structured interviews, employed in this research. In line with the exploratory approach of this study, and as suggested by Bryman (2016), a set of general topics and questions derived from the literature guided the conversation, while allowing the interview to unfold according to the emerging themes.

Flexibility is thus one of the main advantages of this tool. Furthermore, rich data can be gathered through open questions, interviewees are actively involved and rapport can be built (Dörnyei, 2007). Moreover, semi-structured interviews are particularly suitable for belief research because they give participants space and time to elaborate on their tacitly held ideas (Borg, S., 2006). Nonetheless, interviews are also subject to the aforementioned subjectivity bias, as the researcher's positionality can influence how they interpret and react to the participants' answers. Moreover, respondents may try to please or impress the researcher or second-guess her motivations. I countered these pitfalls by establishing rapport and using the respondents' first language to foster a relaxed environment. As recommended by Le and Maley (2012), I also avoided technical language and attempted to make my questions as neutral as possible (e.g. by presenting two opposing views as widely held by people rather than directly asking for teachers' opinions). Nevertheless, some limitations did emerge, as discussed in 4.6.5.

Three types of semi-structured interviews were used with teachers: background (one per teacher), post-observation (one per teacher) and video-stimulated

recall interviews (two per teacher). The following sections discuss each type of interview and provide an overview of the interview data collected.

4.6.4.1 Background interviews

An interview schedule for background interviews (Appendix 6) was designed in preparation of Phase 1 and used with all the teachers. The aim of the background interviews was to collect data on the teachers' life histories (including schooling, teacher training and teaching experience), language learning experiences, contextual factors (school procedures, textbooks, syllabi, exams), students (i.e. numbers, levels) and some initial descriptions of their teaching and listening instruction (e.g. materials, tasks and difficulties).

As the study aimed to elicit beliefs as explanations of practice, background interviews were not designed to focus on beliefs about listening. Nevertheless, they were conducted before the first classroom observation with some teacher participants and after the first observation with others (as detailed in 4.6.4.4). This difference in timing meant that Giulia, for instance, made a few references to her teaching (and associated beliefs) in Observation 1 during her background interview. While this marked a slight difference among cases, it was unavoidable due to scheduling conflicts.

4.6.4.2 Post-observation interviews

During Phase 2, one post-observation interview was carried out with each teacher within eight days of Observation 2. I wrote an interview schedule for each teacher before starting Phase 2. The schedule included some questions common to all teachers, some questions related to each teacher's specific practices observed in Observations 1 and 2, and some blank space for me to write any extra questions arising from Observation 2, for those cases where Observation 2 and the post-observation interview happened on the same day for a teacher (e.g. Maria). As illustrated in the sample post-observation interview schedule in Appendix 7, the initial, more general questions covered topics such as lesson planning, lesson objectives, typical formats of listening activities, learners' reactions, materials and English varieties. These were followed by more teacher-specific questions: for instance, I asked Amalia and Maria about vocabulary pre-teaching, as it was already clear from their observations that this was a feature of their work, and I asked Giulia about the absence of pre-listening in her classes, delving into the concept of "shock effect" that she had started discussing in her background interview.

As will become clear in the following section, post-observation interviews differed from VSR interviews in that they were not based on video or audio

stimuli from classroom observation, but aimed to begin discussing the teachers'
practices and beliefs informally and allow teachers to become accustomed to
being interviewed and elaborating on their work, in preparation for the more
demanding task of reacting to videos of themselves teaching.

4.6.4.3 Video-stimulated recall interviews

Video-stimulated recall is a research technique in which video recordings of
participants' behaviour are used to stimulate reflections on their thinking while
the behaviour was taking place (Gass and Mackey, 2017). Although stimulated
recall has long been used to ask teachers to recall their interactive thinking, this
approach has a number of limitations: not only is it highly dependent on the time
gap between class and interview (the further apart they are, the less
participants are able to rely on their short-term memory), but the extent to which
participants can accurately verbalise previously occurring thoughts is also
questionable (Borg, S., 2006). Consequently, VSR was used in this research to
facilitate discussion of teachers' post-hoc explanations of their practice and
thoughts, rather than to capture interactive thinking.

Two post-observation VSR interviews per teacher were carried out in Phases 3
and 4 respectively using excerpts of classroom practice videoed during
observations. Each VSR interview referred to one specific classroom
observation (see Table 4.4). All VSR interviews took place 24 to 48 hours after
the related classroom observation: this gave me the time to review the videos
and prepare interview schedules, while not leaving too much time between
observation and interview. After Observations 3 and 4, I re-read my fieldnotes
with questions arising from the classes observed and the analytical memos I
produced during data analysis highlighting aspects to be explored further for
each teacher. I then re-watched the full videos and identified excerpts of twenty
seconds to four minutes in duration to re-watch in VSR. Each excerpt was
bookmarked using the Apowersoft Video Recorder software (Apowersoft, 2016).
I then designed the VSR interview schedules. Each schedule included a first
section with introductory questions based on the data analysis conducted in
preparation for the VSR interviews, followed by the bookmarks, the interview
question and some probes (see Appendix 8 for a sample VSR schedule
extract).

When carrying out the interviews, we first discussed the introductory questions,
which served the twofold purpose of clarifying issues that emerged from
previous data collection and making interviewees feel at ease before
introducing them to the potentially more uncomfortable task of watching
themselves teach. Subsequently, I played the excerpts I had selected and

asked questions. I also reiterated to the teachers that they were free to offer their comments on the excerpts as and when they wished. Some challenges arose from VSR interviews and they are discussed in section 4.6.5.

4.6.4.4 Teacher interviews: data collection

The teacher interview data were collected across the four phases of data collection. All interviews were conducted in quiet and safe spaces, mostly empty classrooms or teacher rooms. Interviews were audio recorded on my laptop and tablet. They ranged in duration from 25 to 61 minutes, averaging 45.5 minutes. The details of the interviews are summarised below, with their duration (rounded to the nearest minute), dates and the dates of the classroom observation to which they referred. Background interviews are referred to as Interview 1; Post-observation as Interview 2; VSR 1 as Interview 3; VSR 2 as Interview 4.

Table 4.4: Overview of teacher interview data

Interview	Duration (minutes)	Date	Date of related classroom observation
Maria			
Interview 1	41	16/10/2018	N/A
Interview 2	42	07/11/2018	07/11/2018
Interview 3	43	15/01/2019	14/01/2019
Interview 4	53	02/04/2019	01/04/2019
Giulia			
Interview 1	52	17/10/2018	N/A
Interview 2	49	07/11/2018	06/11/2018
Interview 3	57	16/01/2019	14/01/2019
Interview 4	41	03/04/2019	01/04/2019
Teresa			
Interview 1	45	17/10/2018	N/A
Interview 2	50	12/11/2018	07/11/2018
Interview 3	61	16/01/2019	15/01/2019
Interview 4	44	03/04/2019	02/04/2019
Amalia			
Interview 1	32	17/10/2018	N/A
Interview 2	25	15/11/2018	05/11/2018
Interview 3	48	16/01/2019	14/01/2019
Interview 4	45	03/04/2019	01/04/2019

4.6.5 Challenges in teacher interviews and observations

Some challenges presented themselves in the teacher interviews and observations. Firstly, a practical problem occurred in Teresa's Interview 3: during the corresponding classroom observation, the camera only recorded the first twenty minutes of the video; therefore, the VSR interview was conducted

partially with excerpts from the video and partially with transcriptions of the audio recording of the class.

Secondly, during several teacher interviews and especially when discussing rationales for practices, a limitation arose that has been noted in teacher cognition research (e.g. Borg, S., 2006): teachers provided post-hoc explanations to their practices, and while this is in line with this study's definition of beliefs, sometimes it appeared as if teachers were either struggling to articulate these explanations or they were simply echoing the rationales of exams and textbooks. This was somehow unavoidable, as the topic of listening was not generally something that they had ever thought about extensively (by their own admission, as explained in Chapter 8). Related to this was the difficulty I sometimes encountered in having teachers elaborate on aspects of their work that they took for granted. This was especially the case with Giulia, who held some strong beliefs and was clearly used to defending the quality of her methods to parents and colleagues. This "combative" attitude highlighted (in her case more than others) my voice as a researcher and as a co-constructor of meaning, as I resorted to jokingly playing the devil's advocate to elicit further explanations from her. As recommended by Mann (2011), I evidenced this when analysing and presenting the data, attempting to develop a reflective approach to how my contributions and personality influenced the interview events.

4.6.6 Learner questionnaires

Before the beginning of Observation 1, a questionnaire was administered to the learners to elicit their beliefs and practices related to listening. As shown in Appendix 4, it focused on some sub-topics related to listening drawn from the relevant literature (especially Graham and Santos, 2015; Siegel, 2013; Vandergrift, 2003; Goh, 2000): perceived difficulty, enjoyment, importance, self-concept, types and frequency of classroom and leisure activities, motivation and difficulties. The questionnaire also allowed me to identify volunteers for subsequent interviews, inform the design of the semi-structured learner interviews and focus the study on the areas that were relevant for its context and participants.

Questionnaires have been a feature of language belief research since the introduction of Horwitz's (1985) BALLI, though quantitative questionnaires have been criticised for failing to accurately depict the complexity of beliefs (Kalaja et al., 2018). In this study, a questionnaire allowed for the collection of data from all of the learners involved, which would have been unfeasible had other methods been used. The questionnaire encompassed both closed-ended and

open-ended items and was used in conjunction with observation and learner interviews, thus allowing for triangulation.

The questionnaire included closed-ended items (pre-determining the range of responses available to the informant) and open-ended items (providing blank space to fill with answers, thus supplying qualitative data). Both types of items have disadvantages: closed-ended items limit respondents' options and may not reflect the complexity of their thinking; open-ended questions are often criticised for leading to irrelevant responses, for being too laborious, and for requiring time-consuming coding (Cohen et al., 2007). Nevertheless, closed-ended items were used not only because of their high practicability, but also in light of a long-standing tradition of belief research based on Likert-scale questionnaires (Barcelos, 2015). Furthermore, since beliefs are often unconsciously held and hard to articulate, closed-ended items provided learners with a framework to think about topics they may never have thought about before and guide them in the expression of their views. As regards open-ended questions, they have successfully been used in previous studies with learners (e.g. Graham, 2006) and they are especially useful to gain an emic perspective on what they perceive as relevant, as this might differ from what the researcher expects (Brown, J.D., 2009). This was especially important in the initial phase of the study. Therefore, the questionnaire included closed-ended items, such as Likert scales and multiple choice, as well as open items such as clarification and short answer questions. The items were sequenced by mixing open- and closed-ended questions to prevent a "response set", that is, a hasty and patterned manner of responding to items (Nunan and Bailey, 2009). Finally, caution was taken to avoid leading, complex, biased, demanding, irritating or double-barrelled questions, as recommended by Bryman (2016).

The questionnaire was translated into Italian, the learners' first language, to minimise the potential for misunderstanding. It was piloted and amended based on the learners' feedback, as explained in section 4.6.1. During Phase 1, it was administered online via Online surveys (Jisc, 2020) in the first 15 minutes of Observation 1. The teachers had previously advised the learners to bring a mobile, tablet or laptop to class to complete the questionnaire online. Seventy-five learners took the online version of the questionnaire via an Online surveys link. Nine learners had technical issues (e.g. connection problems), so I provided them with hard copies and subsequently manually input their responses onto Online surveys. The issues emerging from the analysis of the responses to some of the questionnaire items are discussed in section 4.7.3.

4.6.7 Learner interviews

Learner interviews were conducted to generate more in-depth perspectives on the topics of the questionnaire. The semi-structured format of the interviews allowed learners to identify and discuss topics, such as emotions, that were relevant to them but were not among the topics originally included in the questionnaire.

At the end of the questionnaires, learners were asked to write their name if they wanted to volunteer for subsequent interviews. Fifty-six learners agreed to be interviewed. Three learners per class were selected based on the following criteria:

1. The extent to which their open-ended responses were well-articulated;
2. The extent to which their views prompted follow-up questions;
3. Achieving a balance in the interview sample between high and low self-concept students.

Unlike the first two criteria, criterion 3 proved more difficult to apply because interviews revealed that students who appeared to have low self-concept based merely on questionnaire data had in fact more nuanced views of themselves. Further, high self-concept learners also tended to be those with the best-articulated views, which explains the imbalance between low and high self-concept students in the final sample.

Two rounds of interviews were conducted during Phases 2 and 4, as shown in Table 4.5. For the first round of interviews, the interview schedules (of which an example is provided in Appendix 9) were composed of open-ended questions, probes and clarification questions expanding on questionnaire answers. A printed copy of interviewees' questionnaire responses was provided to remind them of their answers. A kinaesthetic activity was also conducted by giving learners slips of paper with quotes describing five attributions (effort, task difficulty, luck, use of strategies and aptitude) and asking them to rank them in order of importance for them.

I had not originally planned to interview the learners twice; however, after analysing the first round of interviews, I realised that some issues (such as emotions and self-concept) deserved further attention and that more concrete discussions focusing on specific instances of classroom practice were necessary. Consequently, I interviewed the learners again during Phase 4, this time straight after class (Observation 4). This was useful especially to understand the learners' difficulties and use of strategies. New semi-structured interview schedules were thus designed for learners, containing some standard questions about the listening activities, followed by learner- and case-specific

questions: for example, the theme of low self-concept due to perceived higher ability of peers was discussed only with Teresa's learners, as this only emerged as an issue in their class.

All the interviews were conducted in Italian, the learners' first language, and in a form accessible to them. I negotiated access to the students with their teachers, so each student left for approximately fifteen minutes to be interviewed. The interviews were conducted in quiet empty classrooms and audio recorded. Table 4.5 describes the interview data collected from each learner.

Table 4.5: Interviewees' characteristics and overview of interview data

Learner	Gender	Self-concept	Interview number	Duration (minutes)	Interview date
Maria					
Roberto	Male	High	1	7	05/11/2018
			2	10	01/04/2019
Pietro	Male	High	1	15	05/11/2018
			2	7	01/04/2019
Lina	Female	Low	1	14	05/11/2018
			2	14	01/04/2019
Giulia					
Caterina	Female	High	1	11	05/11/2018
			2	14	01/04/2019
Enrico	Male	High	1	15	05/11/2018
			2	19	01/04/2019
Irene	Female	Low	1	11	05/11/2018
			2	11	01/04/2019
Teresa					
Silvia	Female	High	1	15	06/11/2018
			2	11	02/04/2019
Federico	Male	Average	1	13	06/11/2018
			2	14	02/04/2019
Bruno	Male	Low	1	13	06/11/2018
			2	18	02/04/2019
Amalia					
Daniela	Female	Low	1	13	15/11/2018
			2	9	01/04/2019
Jonathan	Male	High	1	19	15/11/2018
			2	17	01/04/2019
Nadia	Female	High	1	10	15/11/2018
			2	20	01/04/2019

Some age-specific limitations of learner interviews should be acknowledged. First, Raewyn et al. (2008) claim that recording might intimidate adolescents and recommend letting interviewees get acquainted with the recording equipment, which should not be too noticeable. Teenagers may also view researchers as teachers or informants of their teacher: this power asymmetry may decrease their openness and willingness to respond (Le and Maley, 2012). This was accounted for when interpreting interview data to accurately depict the ecology of relations in the interview (Adamson, 2004). Further, before starting every interview, I told students their answers would be kept private, that there were no right or wrong answers and gave them space to ask me any questions they may have had. The interview also took place in a private, non-threatening and familiar school setting in a relaxed, informal manner.

4.6.8 Document analysis

Document analysis is the analysis of documents containing information relevant to the phenomenon under investigation (Bailey, 1994). It is a frequently used method in social research to supplement other data collection tools (Mogalakwe, 2006) and it entails categorising, investigating and interpreting written sources (Payne and Payne, 2004).

In this research, four types of documents were collected for each teacher:

- **Syllabi**: designed by each teacher for each class;
- **National guidelines** (MIUR, 2010b), providing general guidelines for syllabus content in *liceo classico, scientifico* and *linguistico*;
- **One sample listening test** per teacher;
- **Class materials**, including audio tracks, links to open-access videos, copies of textbook materials and worksheets.

Additionally, Giulia provided a document that she circulated to students and parents explaining her method, as she claimed that this would help me better understand her work.

As per Scott's (1990) recommendations, these documents fulfilled four quality criteria: *authenticity*, as they were all genuine and coming from reliable sources; *credibility*, as, to my knowledge, they were not altered or distorted for my benefit; *representativeness,* as they were typical of their kinds for each case; and *meaning*, as they were clear and understandable.

4.6.9 Qualitative and quantitative data

As shown in this discussion of data collection instruments, I collected data that were mostly qualitative, that is, non-numerical and obtained first hand from

observations, interviews and document analyses (Creswell, 2013). Collecting qualitative data in an attempt to understand the participants' own interpretations of the world is typically in line with an interpretivist epistemology and a constructivist ontology (Bryman, 2016). In this study, however, a comparatively small amount of quantitative (i.e. numerical) data were also collected through the learner questionnaire. Further, the open-ended answers collected through the questionnaire were coded and quantified during the data analysis (see section 4.7.3).

This research thus mixes qualitative and quantitative data and could possibly be regarded as mixed methods research. However, given that quantitative data were only collected through some sections of the questionnaire, it is arguably more appropriate to define this study as qualitative with a limited quantitative component, which was used to gain an initial general understanding of the views of the whole student population in this study. The rationale for combining this quantitative component with learner interviews and observations reflects some of the reasons for adopting mixed methods designs identified by Bryman (2016) in his meta-analysis of articles reporting on mixed methods research:

- **Triangulation**: data from the questionnaire were triangulated with interview responses to corroborate each other;
- **Sampling**: the questionnaire was used to facilitate the identification of learners to be interviewed;
- **Instrument development**: the preliminary analysis of the questionnaire responses was used to narrow down the focus of the study, discarding less relevant themes and design the learner interview schedules;
- **Illustration**: qualitative data from the learner interviews provided more detailed insights into the general understanding derived from the questionnaires.

4.7 Data analysis

The qualitative data were analysed through thematic analysis. The process was abductive and iterative. These three core characteristics are described as follows:

- **Thematic analysis** is defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) as a method to identify, analyse, organise, describe and report themes found in data. This type of analysis has sometimes been criticised in the literature for lacking rigour and transparency (Nowell et al., 2017); hence, I endeavour to provide details about how the analysis was conducted, what choices were made and based on what rationales;

- An **abductive approach** combines deductive (moving from theory to empirical observation) and inductive reasoning (moving from empirical observation to theory formation) in a cyclical fashion (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). Sub-themes derived from the literature were used to draft tentative codes for analysis and continuously revised in light of new codes emerging from the study of the data; thus, the analysis was both data-driven and interpreted in light of the literature;
- An **iterative approach**, as I continuously moved between data collection, analysis, representation and writing (Crabtree and Miller, 1999). Indeed, as is often the case with qualitative research, data collection, data analysis and report writing are not easy to distinguish and indeed overlapped (Nowell et al., 2017). Nevertheless, to offer further clarity and enhance the trustworthiness of the study, I attempt to reconstruct the steps in the data analysis chronologically below.

As noted in section 4.6, a progressive focusing approach was used, as the analysis in between phases informed the data collection of the following phase, progressively narrowing down the focus of the study. As summarised in section 4.5, data analysis was conducted between phases of data collection. This was followed by a more intensive period of data analysis after data collection was completed, as discussed in more detail below.

Table 4.6: Data analysis in between data collection phases

Period 1 (19 October - 5 November 2018)
- Interview transcription   - Descriptive statistics analysis of questionnaire (closed-ended items)   - Thematic analysis of questionnaire (open-ended items)   - Summaries of observations   - Drafting memos on key aspects for subsequent observations and teacher interviews
Period 2 (16 November 2018 - 13 January 2019)
- Interview transcription   - Document pre-coding   - Summaries of observations   - Interview pre-coding   - Drafting memos on key aspects for subsequent observations and VSR
Period 3 (18 January - 31 March 2019)
- Summaries of observations   - Interview transcription   - Interview pre-coding
Period 4 (5 April - 13 October 2019)
- Summaries of observations   - Interview transcription   - Interview pre-coding   - Observation pre-coding

The data analysis was conducted with NVivo 12. Manual coding was discarded as an option because I needed the data to be portable given my frequent travels, I was already trained in using NVivo and I wished to explore its potential for analysing and visualising relationships in the data, as suggested by Jackson and Bazeley (2019). After each phase of data collection, the data were organised into folders on an NVivo project file. Each case had five sub-folders, containing respectively teacher interview audios and transcripts; learner interview audios and transcripts; classroom observation audios, videos, scanned observation sheets and summaries; questionnaire summaries; documents. NVivo was a valuable tool to keep a detailed record of all my data and reflections, contributing to the study's confirmability (section 4.8.3).

In terms of the transcription, because the analysis was not primarily linguistic but thematic, a faithful verbatim transcription including linguistic features such as intonation was deemed unnecessary (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). Nevertheless, to enhance the faithfulness of the data (Duff, 2008), a system was developed to indicate when participants expressed emotions (e.g. chuckling, sighing) or hesitation. After careful consideration, I decided to transcribe the interviews, which were conducted in Italian, straight into English. Despite the potential inaccuracies of this approach, I determined that the advantages outweighed the risks in light of my long experience as a professional liaison interpreter and translator of audio material, the benefits of having transcripts in English on NVivo (which does not support Italian) and the pressure to transcribe the data in between data collection phases. Further, to limit the potential for inaccuracy, whenever metaphors or idiomatic phrases were used that could not immediately be translated into English, they were either left in Italian and translated only if the quote was included in the thesis, or left in Italian next to a provisional English translation. The following extract from Amalia's Interview 2 provides a sample of my transcription system:

Chiara: how do they perform in these tests?

Amalia: fairly well, I'd say. It could also be luck [laughs] you know, with three answers, but... I have to say that at first... I mean… I feel tense [tesa] myself when I do listening with them. Because I say 'oh my god, I took one that's too difficult…' then I realise that the second listen is the one that [gli apre tutte le porte].

Regarding the transcription of classroom observations, during the analysis in between phases, I re-watched the videos, listened to the audios, re-read my notes from the observation sheets and produced summaries with the main features of each lesson and some key quotes, transcribed with the same system employed for interviews. During the final, more intensive data analysis period, the videos and audios were re-examined, and additional quotes were

added to the summaries as I focused more on the teaching practices as a starting point for the analysis of beliefs.

Overall, by the end of Period 4, I had finished transcribing all interviews, produced summaries of the classroom observations, analysed the quantitative data of the questionnaire and begun pre-coding the qualitative data. The following sections detail the pre-coding and descriptive statistical analysis carried out until October 2019 and the subsequent phases of coding, synthesising individual case findings, cross-case analysis and interpretation.

4.7.1 Pre-coding and descriptive statistics

In the analysis conducted in Periods 1 to 4, I familiarised myself with the interviews and observations transcripts and documents. I began a process of "pre-coding", whereby I attempted to create some tentative codes (initially descriptive and largely based on the literature, but progressively more and more based on the data), as recommended by Saldaña (2015), while I mostly focused on producing short reflective memos with my observations, questions and links to the literature in the form of NVivo annotations. During these stages, I also kept longer memos summarising what I believed were the main aspects emerging from the data as well as unresolved questions to focus on in subsequent data collection phases. These memos were organised as one memo for teacher data and one for learner data for each case per period of data analysis (totalling sixteen files).

In terms of the questionnaire analysis, I began by using descriptive statistics with the quantitative data and pre-coding the qualitative data to familiarise myself with the trends in the learners' beliefs. The majority of the quantitative data were ordinal, generated from 5-point and 3-point Likert scales asking about students' agreement with statements or about the perceived frequency of activities. These data were analysed through percentages and measures of central tendency (means). Nominal data were also generated through multiple choice questions about biographical data and self-concept.

The qualitative data consisted of short answers to open-ended questions. These were downloaded from Online surveys (Jisc, 2020), uploaded onto NVivo and pre-coded, as I elaborated the first tentative codes to categorise students' answers as well as short reflective memos outlining further questions and issues with coding these answers. I wrote a report summarising the data related to each survey question for each one of the four cases. At this stage, the qualitative data from the questionnaire and learner interviews were still analysed separately from the quantitative data. These and other issues

emerged and were tackled when I moved onto deeper analysis of the data, during the "coding" phase.

4.7.2 Member validation and coding

As Dörnyei (2007) claims, after familiarising oneself with the data and pre-coding, a phase of intensive engagement with the data and more structured coding should occur. In October 2019, I held individual meetings with the teachers sharing my preliminary analysis of their cases, discussed my understanding of their work with them and asked for their feedback in a process of member validation. Member validation includes activities, such as showing participants synthesised analysed data, that allow case members to verify, confirm and reject the researcher's interpretations (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). I showed the teacher participants extracts of my data, discussed my interpretations of their practices and beliefs and noted their feedback on such data and interpretations. This process enriched my analysis and enhanced the credibility of my interpretations. Subsequently, I immersed myself in a prolonged period of data analysis.

Working case by case, I started re-reading all the transcripts and coding them. As I progressed, the codes emerged more and more from the data, as I turned to more inductive analysis to gain an emic perspective. I frequently used in-vivo codes, that is, words or phrases from the participants to label codes (Given, 2008). For example, I created a "fatal flaws" code, named after Giulia's frequently used expression, and a "school English" code (see Figure 4.2), after the phrase used by Maria's learners. This added authenticity to the analysis and allowed me to see issues through the eyes of the participants, giving prominence to the aspects that were relevant to them.

As I progressed with coding, I merged similar codes and deleted those that I initially believed might be relevant but proved irrelevant or marginal (for example, I thought that "grammar" was interesting initially but ultimately irrelevant). Further, by moving from case to case, I continuously revised codes in light of how they applied to the same data sets in new cases, as advised by Bazeley (2009): for instance, I understood that the clear-cut distinction among pre-, while- and post-listening codes that worked well in Maria's case could not be applied as seamlessly to Giulia's.

As I continued revising and engaging with the qualitative data, I began to group similarly coded data into higher-order "categories", identifying more interpretive patterns in the data (Saldaña, 2015). An example is shown below in Figure 4.2, related to learners' beliefs about English varieties (including in-vivo codes in inverted commas). This process was the first step to begin to see the "bigger

picture" and synthesise the individual case findings. While I categorised these data from observations, teacher interviews and documents, I also moved on with the analysis of the learner data, as discussed in the next section.

Figure 4.2: Sample codes grouped under the category named "Beliefs about English varieties"

4.7.3 Questionnaire and learner interviews: data integration

Due to the time constraints in the data analysis conducted during data collection, the quantitative and qualitative data related to learners were initially only analysed separately. However, when I began the coding phase, I started integrating them. In this section, I discuss how I integrated the quantitative questionnaire data, the qualitative questionnaire data and the qualitative interview data via data transformation and category development (Huberman and Miles, 1994).

While I already had descriptive statistics for the ordinal and nominal data from the questionnaire, I needed to analyse the questionnaire qualitative data (i.e. responses to open-ended questions) more robustly and in a way that would allow for triangulation with the learner interview data. Therefore, I developed the initial tentative codes produced during pre-coding into codes and categories both drawn from the literature and from emerging data, to quantify the questionnaire responses. This produced categories and sub-categories for the following themes of the questionnaire data:

Table 4.7: Quantified questionnaire data

Theme	Categories
Reasons for the importance of listening	1. Communication 2. Development of other skills and systems 3. Future jobs

Attributions	1. Adaptive
	    1a. Strategies
	    1b. Effort
	2. Maladaptive
	    2a. Innate aptitude
	    2b. Task difficulty
	    2c. Luck

Leisure listening activities	1. Videos 2. TV series 3. Films 4. Songs 5. Podcasts 6. News 7. Radio 8. Lectures

Using these categories, I coded the open responses and created tables ranking the categories based on how many times they were coded to understand the general trends in the learners' beliefs. Developing these categories presented challenges, but also helped me look more closely at the data, identify limitations in the questionnaire and refine the analysis. For example, question 9 asked students to explain why they could or could not complete most listening activities in the class. I expected students to discuss their attributions, i.e. their perceived reasons for their successes or failures. However, I realised that some students had interpreted the Italian word *perché* in the question not as "why", but as "in what sense", and had thus explained not the reasons to which they attributed successes and failures, but simply the ways in which this success/failure manifested itself (e.g. *"I can understand what the video says, so I can complete the related exercises"*). As this question was meant to elicit attributions, and did so in most responses, I proceeded to discard these irrelevant responses from the analysis.

In mixed methods analysis, quantitative and qualitative data can be integrated in the analysis. In my research, I applied the categories from the questionnaire to code the learner interview data. These categories included both the original labels of the ordinal and nominal quantitative data (e.g. high and low self-concept) and the categories developed to quantify the open-ended responses. This was a useful strategy not only because it allowed me to compare questionnaire and interview data, but also because it helped identify the dimensions of the interviews that necessitated new categories: in other words, it helped identify the themes of learner emotions and listening strategies, which

were not originally covered in the questionnaire but represented key topics on which learners held beliefs. The opposite process also occurred, as coding learner interviews highlighted the limited relevance of some topics that were included in the questionnaire, such as motivation related to listening. The 3-point Likert scales from the questionnaire eliciting responses on motivation (survey question 13) were already of limited value in the quantitative analysis, as the mean values were all very similar; when analysing interviews, I realised that the dimensions of motivation covered in the questionnaire (intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative) were not particularly relevant to the interviewees and were already embedded in the themes of self-concept and perceived reasons for the importance of listening. The theme of "motivation" was thus not included in the findings.

The coding and memoing regarding learner interviews culminated in a comparison with the questionnaire data. In line with the methodology of the study, the interview data were used to corroborate the questionnaire findings. While most of the interview data remained qualitative in nature, the data regarding two interview themes (listening strategies and listening difficulties) were quantified. After unsuccessfully attempting to create a taxonomy of strategies inductively, the strategies elicited were categorised based on Goh's (2002) taxonomy. "Making notes" (a strategy normally classed as cognitive) and socio-affective strategies were omitted in Goh (2002), but added to the analysis in this study, resulting in the categorisation summarised in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Listening strategies reported in interviews

Cognitive strategies
Making notes
Visualisation
Visualising words
Fixation
Holding things in memory
Stopping and focusing
Contextualisation
Making connections between parts
Drawing on knowledge of genre
Identifying number of speakers
Elaboration
Using words learned in pre-listening
Inferencing
Guessing
Deducing based on context
Deducing based on co-text
Drawing on world knowledge
Drawing on topic knowledge
Focusing on pictures
Exploiting captions
Interpreting speaker's tone
Looking at speaker's lips
Metacognitive strategies
Pre-listening preparation
Deciding which questions to answer first
Reading task before listening
Comprehension monitoring
Using second listen to double-check
Using second listen to focus on what was not understood in first listen
Choosing two options then discarding one with second listen
Reading transcript
Replaying multiple times
Directed attention
Persevering in face of difficulty
Concentrating hard
Skipping words not understood and continuing listening

Selective attention
Focusing on key points
Listening for details
Trying to understand all the words
Distinguishing key points from peripheral points
Focusing on key words
Focusing on speaker
Focusing on beginning of text
Focusing on words
Listening out for specific sounds
Socioaffective strategies
Affective strategies
Managing anxiety, remaining calm
Coping with messiness, incomplete answers
Coping with not understanding everything
Social strategies
Asking teacher or classmate for clarifications
Interrupting and asking questions

Some limitations should be acknowledged in this process of quantification. First, only limited conclusions can be drawn from data elicited from twelve learners and twenty-four interviews focused only partially on strategies. Further, while Table 4.8 can provide a useful overview, the strategies were analysed only with reference to how many learners reported using the groups of strategies categorised as cognitive, metacognitive and socio-affective. A more reliable approach to strategy analysis, accounting for how strategies are used by learners to tackle specific problems, would necessitate more data elicited with reference to specific listening tasks and was thus beyond the scope of this study.

In terms of listening difficulties, interview data were coded based on the ten categories of difficulties in the questionnaire and on additional categories not originally included in the questionnaire (e.g. speed, emotions and connected speech). Tables were produced ranking difficulties from the two data sets based on the percentages of agreement for each difficulty in the questionnaire and on the number of students citing the different difficulties in the interviews. This allowed me to see the limitations of ranking difficulties based only on the survey question about difficulties, as mean values never exceeded 3.68 (on a scale from 1 to 5). Further, in terms of percentages of students agreeing or disagreeing with statements, there were no clear majorities of agreement in any

item (except difficulties related to words and open essay questions). This preference for less extreme statements possibly indicates that the options listed in the survey question may have been of limited relevance to the learners or that placing it as the last survey question may have led students to rush through their responses.

4.7.4 Synthesising individual case findings

After coding and categorising, I realised that I was struggling to see the "bigger picture" in each case and how the teacher and learner data were related. In other words, after an analytical period, I needed to start moving toward synthesising each case. I achieved this through the following techniques facilitated by NVivo, as recommended by Jackson and Bazeley (2019):

- **Hierarchy charts**: I visualised the main codes for the teacher and learner data respectively in each case with hierarchy charts, showing the most used codes. With each hierarchy chart, I identified major and minor themes and re-read the related quotes from the participants;
- **Framework matrices**: I designed framework matrices, i.e. tables comparing the data related to the three learner interviewees in each case on the themes previously identified as key via hierarchy charts;
- **Triangulation of questionnaire and learner interviews**: I revised the comparative analysis of questionnaire and learner interviews and summarised the data related to the key themes;
- **Summarising key points for each data set:** for each case, I wrote a long memo summarising key points from each data set. These memos contained "See also links", through which NVivo allows for sections of memos to be connected to specific data. This way, I could move easily from summaries to participants' words;
- **Concept maps**: I created concept maps to visualise the summaries more succinctly. This was especially helpful in putting teaching practices back at the centre of the analysis at a time when I was focusing on teacher beliefs and neglecting to see that practices were actually my starting point. Appendix 14 provides a sample concept map that I built while attempting to make sense of the relationships between Maria's beliefs and practices.

4.7.5 Cross-case analysis and interpretation

After synthesising and writing up the four individual cases, I moved onto cross-case analysis, which seeks to build abstractions across cases by identifying patterns in the categories found in them (Merriam, 2009). Finally, the findings were related to the literature in a process of interpretation, defined by Patton as:

attaching significance to what was found, making sense of the findings, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, extrapolating lessons, making inferences, considering meanings and otherwise imposing order. (2002, p. 480)

While interpretations based on intuitions and reflections occurred to me throughout the whole data analysis, it was only when I wrote the individual findings cases and the cross-case analysis that I was able to "step back and form larger meanings" (Creswell, 2007, p. 154) of the findings. I re-organised the themes and conceptualised them as answers to the research questions. Further, I displayed them visually as concept maps on NVivo, with links to the relevant literature.

4.8 Trustworthiness

As noted previously, the present study is predominantly qualitative and follows an interpretive paradigm. Consequently, its quality is not best evaluated according to the criterion of statistical generalisability (more applicable to quantitative research), but to *trustworthiness,* or the confidence in the data, interpretation, and methods used in a study. As Morse (2015) reports, this standard, originally introduced by Lincoln and Guba (1985), has now become common in attempting to demonstrate the rigour of qualitative research. I thus refer to analytical generalisability, that is, generalising to theory: case studies are

"generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes. In this sense, the case study, like the experiment, does not represent a "sample," and in doing a case study, your goal will be to expand and generalize theories (analytic generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization)" (Yin, 2009: 15)

Having established my rationale for aiming for trustworthiness, I will now discuss the strategies that I employed to fulfil the four criteria of *credibility, transferability*, *confirmability* and *dependability.*

4.8.1 Credibility

Credibility addresses how respondents' views of the world fit with the ways in which researchers interpret them (Nowell et al., 2017). Given the key role of teachers' and learners' beliefs in this research, attempts to enhance credibility of the study were made via prolonged engagement, triangulation and member validation.

Prolonged engagement means spending a sufficient amount of time observing, speaking and developing rapport with participants so that co-construction of meaning and understanding on the part of the researcher are facilitated (Lincoln

and Guba, 1985). As previously noted, I spent a considerable amount of time in the school throughout an academic year, even becoming involved in the school's own activities. Further, I frequently engaged with the teachers via emails and phone while not on site.

Triangulation, "the use of more than one method or source of data in the study of a social phenomenon so that findings may be cross-checked" (Bryman, 2016, p. 717), was also a feature of this study. By incorporating different methods and viewpoints, research can strengthen the credibility of its findings, as each method can compensate for the weaknesses of other methods employed. Triangulation is especially a feature of mixed method research (Johnson, R. et al., 2007): although the present study only included a small amount of quantitative data, these were leveraged to gain a wider picture of the learners' beliefs. This study employed two types of triangulation based on Denzin (1978): methodological triangulation, employing different methods to investigate the same phenomenon, and triangulation of data sources, generating data at different times and with different participants. To illustrate this point more concretely, Table 4.9 provides examples of how findings were triangulated and of themes analysed via triangulation:

Table 4.9: Examples of triangulation of findings

Data collection instruments	Type of triangulation	Examples of themes analysed
Questionnaire / learner interviews	Methodological	Listening difficulties; attributions
Teacher interviews / classroom observation	Methodological	Classroom materials; pre-listening activities
Teacher interviews / documents	Methodological	Beliefs about contextual factors: syllabi and textbooks
Teacher interviews / learner interviews	Data sources (different participants)	Intersections of teachers' and learners' beliefs
Learners interviews 1 / learner interviews 2	Data sources (different points in time)	Listening strategies; listening difficulties

One further strategy through which credibility was pursued was member validation, whereby researchers give participants transcripts of their interviews to comment on their accuracy or accounts of their findings to comment on their interpretations (Creswell, 2013). In this research, I held individual meetings with teachers at the end of data collection to present them with summaries of my preliminary findings, including quotes from their interviews, and asked them to comment on them. This helped me check my interpretations against their perspectives and pay more attention to the aspects that they deemed important.

4.8.2 Transferability

As previously noted, this research endeavours to provide the reader with the evidence necessary to determine whether the findings are applicable to other contexts (Creswell, 2007). This is achieved through *thick description* (Geertz, 1973), providing detailed accounts of the phenomenon under study and the context in which it is situated, as I did by discussing multiple perspectives on listening, enhanced by the extensive use of extracts from interviews and observations in the findings chapters, as well as in-depth discussions of the context in which participants operated.

4.8.3 Confirmability and dependability

Confirmability is another criterion in the framework of trustworthiness defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), referring to the extent to which the researcher can demonstrate that their findings and the conduct of the research have not been unduly influenced by personal values, assumptions or interest (while acknowledging, however, that neutrality and objectivity are not the primary aims of an interpretive co-construction of meaning). Aside from triangulation, confirmability can be improved by means of audit trails and reflexivity. In terms of the audit trails, this research provides a transparent description of the various phases of the research thanks to a detailed record including raw data, summaries of data (e.g. observation summaries) and of data sets (e.g. long memos summarising data sets for each case), synthesis products (themes and relationships among themes, as described in the findings chapters) and instrument development information (e.g. description of changes in data collection instruments following the pilot). Audit trails also aid in enhancing dependability, as the researcher is responsible for describing any changes in the setting and how they may have affected the study. Confirmability of the study was further enhanced by my reflexivity about my position, values and assumptions and how these impacted me throughout the study, as described in 4.4.2.

4.9 Data reference system

Throughout the thesis, extracts from interviews and observations are presented. After each extract, I provide the initial of the participant's pseudonym, followed by the initial of the type of data (I= interview; O = observation) and the number (teacher background, post-observation, VSR1 and VSR2 interviews were numbered 1-4 in this chronological order). By way of example, then, Teresa's post-observation interview was referred to as TI2. The quotations are all in

English, translated from Italian; however, whenever something was said in English during interviews, this text is underlined.

4.10 Summary

This chapter has examined the methodology employed in this study. After discussing the research questions, I explained how the interpretive, constructivist ontology and epistemology of the research informed the multiple case study approach, my decisions regarding sampling, my positionality, data collection instruments and data analysis. In four phases of data collection throughout an academic year, I collected data from four teachers and 84 learners through teacher interviews, classroom observations, learners' interviews, a learner questionnaire and documents provided by teachers. I analysed the qualitative data through thematic analysis and the quantitative data via descriptive statistics. The findings were triangulated and synthesised to produce the analyses of the four individual cases, as discussed in the following chapters, as well as a cross-case analysis. The quality of the research was enhanced through a number of strategies (including triangulation, member validation, reflexivity and thick description) aimed at maximising its trustworthiness.

I now begin to outline the findings from the research, starting from Maria's case.

Chapter 5 Maria

This chapter analyses Maria's approach to teaching listening and how she made sense of it. Subsequently, it discusses her learners' beliefs and reported practices. Finally, an overview of the interactions between teacher beliefs and practices and learners' beliefs and practices is provided.

5.1 Context

For this project, Maria selected one of her third-year *liceo scientifico* classes. The group, composed of twenty students, attended a type of school focusing predominantly on scientific subjects, some of which, such as chemistry, were taught in English. Students even had the option of taking International GCSE. Being in their third year of *liceo*, they were introduced to the study of English literature, to which Maria devoted one or two of the three weekly hours of English. This was in line with the class syllabus, designed by Maria based on school and ministerial guidelines. Although it mentioned some communicative functions, the syllabus presented a list of grammatical structures, especially verb tenses. Most of the syllabus was dedicated to the study of English literature, which Maria regarded as a valid medium for teaching language. In the classes observed, the main resources used by Maria were the textbook, *Empower Upper Intermediate* (Doff et al., 2015), and PowerPoint presentations that she designed based on the textbook contents.

5.2 Teacher profile

Maria had over 35 years of experience teaching English. After working on temporary contracts for years, she gained tenure and started working in her current school, where she had been for eighteen years when the study began. Her experience was wide-ranging, having worked in all the different types of secondary schools in the Italian system, teaching English and co-teaching CLIL with chemistry teachers. She began studying English in lower secondary school and continued in *liceo scientifico*, during which she had study abroad experiences in the UK and Germany. She qualified as a teacher by gaining a Master's Degree in Modern Foreign Languages (English and German) and passing the national teaching exam. In terms of teacher training, when she started working, she was mentored in-service by a senior teacher that she thought had influenced her pedagogy. Maria also reported joining short seminars throughout her career and, more recently, using her annual CPD allowance on webinars, especially seeking to improve her teaching of vocabulary.

5.3 Listening instruction

Maria's approach to listening followed a recurrent structure including pre-, while- and post-listening activities, generally based on the textbook. As will become clear from her practices and beliefs, her pre-listening activities were inspired by the overarching principle that learners should be prepared as much as possible for their listening, to increase their chances of success and decrease potential for frustration, which would jeopardise their self-concept.

5.3.1 Pre-listening

In all the classes observed, before starting a listening activity, Maria did at least one vocabulary-based and one topic-based activity (e.g. schemata activation, making predictions about content) with her learners. In terms of vocabulary, which was a core concern for her, she either focused on words that would appear in the listening text (generally following textbook exercises) or use PowerPoint presentations designed by her, focusing on vocabulary that was not part of the listening, but related to the topic.

When working on vocabulary from the listening text, she often had students match words with definitions and then went through their answers together:

Maria: right, before you listen, I'd like you to see if you can match the words on the left with their meaning on the right, so just match them… they will be in the listening, so…

[learners start doing the exercise]

Student 1: what is "desist"?

Maria: try to think of that word in Italian.

Student 2: what do we have to do?

Maria: I just want you to match.

[learners do the exercise quietly for two minutes]

Maria: so "public relations", Mara, what do you think it is?

Mara: f

Maria: performance review, what is that? Alessia?

Alessia: no idea.

[…]

Student 3: what does it mean available?

Maria: that you can use it. "Niece", Eleonora? Do you remember niece? We studied it.

Eleonora: yes, "nipote"

Maria: very good girl. "Run a firm"? This is something very Italian.

Students: d

Maria: Beatrice, accountant?

Beatrice: h

Maria: right, very good. Now, "borrow", we studied it. Anybody remember it?

Student 4: a (MO1)

In her interviews, Maria indicated that expanding the learners' vocabulary was a key concern for her and one of the reasons why she dedicated time to vocabulary in her pre-listening, including even words that would not appear in the text. This concern for vocabulary, however, was not an end in itself, but, as discussed below in more detail, it served an even higher purpose in Maria's belief system: to give learners as much control as possible over their listening so that they could avoid failing.

Maria tried to prevent failure in listening not only by pre-teaching vocabulary, but also by activating the learners' background knowledge and having them make predictions about the content of the listening. To her, these activities were inextricably linked. In Observation 3, for instance, she first pre-taught some vocabulary on the topic of learning and memorisation techniques (see Appendix 10), then elicited the learners' background knowledge on this and finally showed them pictures of the three speakers in the listening, asking the learners to predict what type of issues the speakers might have and what learning techniques they might use. She explained the relationship between these tasks (note that, as mentioned in Chapter 4, the sections underlined were uttered in English during the interview):

Maria: This is aimed at facilitating their comprehension, in the sense that if [they] predict what they'll be talking about, it will be easier for them to understand. This was just it. They managed very well too, they identified the problems each speaker might have and this made listening easier compared to just listening without... so I mean <u>tune in and predict.</u>

Chiara: in the sense of vocabulary or content?

Maria: both. Because if you expect him or her to speak about something, you immediately select a certain type of lexis, I think, from a mental point of view. You make choices. And this helps them. Then they won't understand some words, but they have some expectations, so they're aligned. (MI3)

Maria thus saw it as her role to help the students as much as possible before listening by preparing them in terms of vocabulary and content. Avoiding a feeling of frustration and failure in her learners emerged as a pressing issue, to the extent that after such long activation work, the real listening comprehension work needed from the learners was actually limited:

Maria: First we looked at the tips, the people, what they thought they were going to be talking about... it's basically all done, now just listen and see if what you predicted is true. So it's a very simple task. The language is little: they just need to understand one or two words in the listening.

Chiara: so they did this activation work beforehand…

Maria: it's a matter of understanding globally. Which is something that makes them feel stronger in their sense of "how much I can understand". (MI3)

This need to make classroom listening achievable in order to increase the learners' self-concept, even to the extent that the task was simplified, was visible in many aspects of Maria's work, including the structured and guided work that she gave learners during their listening.

5.3.2 While-listening

In her observations, after the pre-listening activities, Maria played a textbook recording twice. The first listening was normally for gist, with tasks such as listening to identify a topic, choosing between a list of given topics or identifying whether an experience was positive or negative. Following the textbook, the second listening aimed for more detailed comprehension, with tasks such as making notes about specific sections of a speech or ranking some given actions based on their order in the listening text.

This is a common approach in language teaching and it resembled the textbook closely. Despite showing awareness of the difference between gist and detail listening, however, Maria saw the second listening more as a springboard to teach vocabulary and grammar than to understand the details of a listening text:

Chiara: why do you let them listen twice?

Maria: well, twice because the first listen is a general listening. The exercise is "I broadly understand", which is what I'm interested in for the first listening. Then we go deeper. I use the second listening for the vocabulary, for the structures, phrasal verbs. (MI2)

This view of listening as a springboard for vocabulary and grammar was further evidenced by the fact that even during gist listening activities, Maria decided to insert some small "extra" tasks asking for specific words, such as adjectives or collocations, that she ultimately wanted her students to learn. For instance, in a listening activity about a researcher studying penguins in Antarctica (Appendix 11), Maria added her own question to the textbook comprehension questions:

Maria: so these [words] are taken from a site with all synonyms and antonyms. So in the audio we're going to listen to, at a certain point penguins are described as "full of..."? One word. I would like you to

> *tell me. OK so now, what do you think it is? An adjective on the left or on the right?*
>
> *Students: left, left!*
>
> *Maria: okay, so tame, cute, sweet... so let's listen. Let's read the introduction: "Martha is going to Antarctica to do research on Adelie penguins. She talks to her friend Joe about her work. Listen and answer the questions". What are the questions? [Maria reads the four comprehension questions] and then the question I asked you, okay? "Full of", dot dot dot, okay? Right. (MO4)*

When asked to elaborate on this, she explained how she wanted her students to notice certain words in the text:

> *Maria: "full of attitude", I wanted them to look at this idiom. And I wanted them not to miss it. Because this is a linguistic aspect proper, so what does it mean to be full of attitude? And they said it was positive but there was also something more. So I wanted them to notice this and to understand that it was negative, and I wanted them to learn it. I wanted this to become their vocabulary. Otherwise they would have missed it, I think. (MI4)*

Two considerations emerge from this. First, Maria's approach to teaching was carefully structured, establishing specific boundaries to what was to be covered in class: the vocabulary, as well as the comprehension questions, were pre-determined by her and largely based on the textbook. This fixed structure, including the use of comprehension questions, was once again an instrument to guide the students and give them control over their listening. Second, Maria's reasons for doing listening seemed to be more linguistic (i.e. focused on teaching linguistic aspects such as vocabulary or grammar) than content-oriented, that is, focusing on the content of the text. This appeared even clearer in her post-listening work, the topic of the next section.

5.3.3 Post-listening

After playing the audio twice, Maria went through the students' answers to the set comprehension questions. Her decisions regarding what questions to ask particular students were carefully calculated based, once again, on the belief that part of her role was boosting the learners' self-concept, even if this meant somehow simplifying the task demands:

> *Maria: today I felt bad because I asked Alessia a question and her answer was wrong... I felt bad because I was convinced she would give me the right answer, because for her, that's a way of getting stronger, but I actually hurt her in terms of her self-esteem... "I don't understand anything". So it was my mistake, I asked her something I was sure she'd answer positively to, but she felt... I told myself, I made a mistake, I should've asked her something easier. (MI2)*

After checking the learners' answers, Maria proceeded to focus on the vocabulary or grammatical structures from the audio based on the transcript. When grammar was the ultimate purpose of a listening activity, she actually expected her learners to notice the target structures that had been covered in the past and when they did not, she regarded this as a failure. In Observation 4, after the listening, she tried to elicit future perfect based on the listening; however, her students had not noticed it:

> *Maria: they didn't notice the signals from the language, which I thought would be evident.*
>
> *Chiara: Like future perfect.*
>
> *Maria: Future perfect, yes, I took it for granted because we did it and they understood it. Now they lost it, so fair enough, we will cover it again.*
>
> *Chiara: Are you saying they didn't hear it?*
>
> *Maria: They didn't hear it. They didn't give it the importance that they should have given it. They heard the story without focusing on what it was. (MI4)*

This implicit expectation that learners would notice certain grammatical structures is reflected in the fact that whenever the listening was used as a way to teach grammar, this grammar would "tacitly" be part of the next language test; as discussed in section 5.10.2, the learners were aware of this implicit connection.

5.4 Purposes of listening

The two main purposes explicitly stated by Maria for doing listening in the classroom were to enrich the learners' vocabulary and to practise grammar. Maria also mentioned that she did listening activities to develop listening and it is worth exploring how she personally construed this concept. Maria was aware of the difficulties posed by bottom-up processing, especially lexical segmentation:

> *Maria: for some of them, at this point it all sounds like one whole sound that has one meaning. So I just need to make the weaker students perceive words within the sound. That's why there's all this prior activation, to make them understand "look, you are actually able to understand". (MI3)*

Her approach to developing bottom-up listening was thus to prepare the learners thoroughly in advance of the listening, limiting the unpredictability of the text, rather than practising bottom-up processing in the classroom (something that did not occur in classroom observations). Bottom-up difficulties were thus to be tackled with pre-listening activities, which were meant to

increase the learners' ability to compensate for their gaps in bottom-up processing. Maria tried to make this clear to her students:

> *Maria: I try to make them understand that they don't necessarily need to understand everything in order to understand the global meaning. (MI2)*

Overall, by pre-teaching vocabulary, preparing the students on the topic of the listening and providing them with structured tasks guiding their comprehension, Maria posed only a limited challenge to the learners in their listening. While this appeared to decrease the demands placed on the students (and may have been reflected in the students' low levels of listening anxiety, as discussed in section 5.10.3), and arguably the resemblance of the task to real-life difficulty of listening, it served the purpose, in Maria's view, of guaranteeing an experience of success:

> *Chiara: and what difficulties could this exercise have for them?*
>
> *Maria: low difficulty. Yes, because after all the work we had done, there was no doubt about whether they could make mistakes (MI3)*

5.5 Listening materials: topics and English varieties

Maria used textbook materials for all the observations in this study, as detailed in Table 5.1:

Table 5.1: Features of listening activities used by Maria

Observation number	Source	Topic	English variety
1	*Empower*	Technology in everyday life	Non-native and British English
2	*Empower*	Novel *The Tiger*	American and British English
3	*Empower*	Learning techniques	British English
4	*Empower*	Research on penguins	British English

As is sometimes the case with commercial ELT textbooks aimed at school learners, the topics of the listening activities were not especially controversial or demanding. Indeed, topics did not emerge as a key concern for Maria, who was more interested in harnessing textbook materials for linguistic work, as mentioned in section 5.3.2, rather than to cover or reflect on any specific topic.

The second core observation to be drawn from Table 5.1 concerns the English varieties used in listening activities. In various interviews, Maria referred to

"standard" British English as her own favourite variety and the one that she used most often in classroom listening. She referred to American and other Inner Circle varieties as more difficult for the students to understand:

> *Chiara: in today's listening, the interviewer sounded British, the interviewee American.*
>
> *Maria: not very, though. I struggle to use American, because I… although I had American classmates in Germany, I have never... I listen to the BBC, British radio, I try to keep my memories of the sound as fresh as I can thanks to the tools we have nowadays, thank God for them. I'm fine with other varieties as long as they're not negative for [the students]. It has to be understandable American: don't use Texan for these kids, they can't do it. I can't do it myself. Or a New Zealander speaking with a local accent. It's impossible. It depends on your level of course: if it's a high C2, of course, you can use any varieties… but again, you need a <u>tune in</u> phase […] for their level, some different accents are fine as long as they're not too different. They still have to be able to understand something, otherwise they give up. Self-esteem… "I can't understand, I'm unable to do it, I will never be able to do it".*
>
> *Chiara: so do you prefer British English?*
>
> *Maria: for myself, yes; for the audios, I choose what I've got. The textbook has a bit of everything, but it's quite British, yes. (MI2)*

Her decisions as to what varieties to use seemed to depend on a number of factors: first, whether she thought that they would be accessible to her students, which she gauged at least partially based on her own difficulties and language learning experiences, like other teachers in this study. Second, her decisions were based to a great extent on the textbook materials available (with which she engaged critically, as discussed in section 5.6). Overall, however, Maria's belief in setting boundaries to learning to prevent failure (and the associated decrease in learner self-concept) appeared once again prominent in her pedagogical decisions.

Another important element in Maria's beliefs about what English to use and teach in school consisted of how she conceived of exam requirements, especially in terms of INVALSI and Cambridge exams. The new INVALSI test seemed to make her doubt her preference for British English:

> *Chiara: what do you think about the new INVALSI?*
>
> *Maria: well, there were three B1 exercises... the second one was in American, which made me and [my colleague] think… we said you see, we shouldn't always be doing British English. So we have to do different accents. The second listening was complex, but the task was easy, it was B1. The issue is the students give up; they don't understand so... I told them, the task is feasible, don't be put off by the audio. (MI1)*

The introduction of the INVALSI for fifth-year *liceo* was still recent news at the time of the data collection, so the extent to which these reflections impacted Maria's teaching practice may have been limited. However, it is still worth noting how exam demands seemed to be an important factor in her belief system. A certain level of washback effect was also visible in her beliefs about what English to use in the classroom:

> *Maria: there are many aspects of the English language I don't share with them. I mostly give them formal English, because I don't tell them how to speak at the pub. They might learn that and much more in the future. I mostly teach them the English they need to pass their exams, like First Certificate. (MI1)*

This idea of "formal English", influenced by Cambridge exams and apparently detached from more informal, spoken language, appeared in line with the principle permeating much of Maria's work that there should be boundaries to what was to be learned in her classes. Further, the concept of "formal English" somehow filtered down to the students, who described "school English" as a specific type of language, different from "real" English (see section 5.10.2).

5.6 Critical engagement with contextual factors

In her work, Maria had to reckon with a number of contextual factors that influenced her practices and clashed with some of her beliefs. In her interviews, she showed a critical and reflective attitude towards these issues. This section examines the main contextual factors impinging on Maria's practice and her beliefs about these factors: examinations, the textbook, CLIL, the syllabus and the teaching of literature.

As previously mentioned, washback was visible in various aspects of Maria's listening assessment and classroom practice. In terms of assessment, she did not see her classes as a place for ongoing informal evaluation, like other teachers did. Conversely, she reported assessing listening primarily through formal tests resembling Cambridge exams (especially IELTS and FCE), with some influence of the INVALSI test too:

> *Chiara: how are your tests structured?*
>
> *Maria: I take IELTS or Cambridge listening tests, because I say, we've done a lot of them, they also do them at home as homework, let's try one… I give them one as homework, IELTS… or I normally prefer a Cambridge First Certificate one because they give them a double replay. I will do IELTS later. Now that I've seen the government has introduced a double replay too, I will also always do it. But yes, I do it, I let them try. They don't do badly. I did a First test and a class only had one student who failed, so they were happy. I mark them with FCE criteria. (MI2)*

Based on this quote, it is also worth noting that her concern with giving learners success experiences was visible in her approach to assessment as well as in her teaching practices, some of which she explained in connection to examination requirements. Indeed, in Observation 2, before playing an audio activity about a novel on a tiger, she took the opportunity to teach collective nouns for animals (e.g. herd, flock). This vocabulary is fairly low frequency and it did not appear in the listening text, so I was prompted to ask her to elaborate on how she decided what to include in her classes:

> *Chiara: so how do you decide what to skip in the textbook?*
>
> *Maria: I skip… for example, in this textbook there are "everyday English" videos, something like that, which I think aren't very… they're a bit boring for our students so I skip them [..] I'd rather expand on other things, such as the collective noun thing I did this morning, because in some Cambridge exams, First and Advanced, they ask for this kind of words. That's the only reason I put them in there. They might do the certificate, so I include them in my lessons now. (MI2)*

Maria openly acknowledged that examinations influenced her practices. However, she was also critical of them, stating that they were not a good measure of proficiency, that they placed an unfair financial burden on students and, crucially, that her teaching had worsened due to the influence of these exams:

> *Maria: these exams are required at university, so I have to be honest with the students and help them. I tell them I'll help you, we can stay in the afternoon, no problem, but it's restrictive. It helps you study, sure… with this generation, unless they have a reason to study, it's hard. Only few of them do it consistently. They need to gain something from it, but it's degrading compared to the richness of the language […] Now with the new INVALSI exam, I realise how my teaching has been impoverished. It has all become just a matter of doing a little reading or filling a little gap, a multiple choice or a word transformation. So it's not free, it's not "I teach the language", I feel obliged to do this. It's useful to make them study, but I don't believe in this […] I'm an idealist, I'm passionate, but of course I adapt, I mean, I give them this [home]work, I try to help them pass them. (MI1)*

This extract exemplifies not only how conscious Maria was of this negative washback, but it is also an explanation of an apparent contradiction between beliefs and practice: in the clash between Maria's more "idealistic" negative beliefs about language certificates and her beliefs about the future needs of her students, the latter prevailed, influencing her practice, albeit to her distress.

Examinations also appeared influential in her approach to the textbook. Although she felt that she "had to" use *Empower* because the school's English

department had selected it, she accepted this as long as the book contained enough practice of the aspects tested in Cambridge exams. Despite the apparent imposition of the textbook, she used it as an instrument of inclusion, again connected to her belief in placing specific boundaries to learning to protect the weaker students, and she sometimes also used her own materials (such as PowerPoint presentations in the lessons observed for this study):

> *Maria: [the textbook] is a way to give everybody the opportunity to work on something that is predetermined, fixed. The vocabulary is endless and I have to put in boundaries (MI4)*

> *Maria: I try to use the textbook, especially the first three years because I realise it's a point of reference for them. I expand on it perhaps, but it's the starting point. I want them to have it at home if they're absent. Even if I don't like it... I might expand on it with other materials. (MI1)*

Maria's teaching also showed the influence of CLIL, another important contextual factor. In the observations, she brainstormed chemistry-related vocabulary as pre-listening and assigned lab reports to write as post-listening homework. These and other similarly CLIL-inspired reported practices were connected to her own previous and positive experience teaching chemistry in English and, once again, to examination requirements, as the students in this class could choose to take International GCSE. Maria felt it was at least partially her duty to prepare them.

Two final contextual constraints are worthy of discussion: the teaching of English literature and the syllabus. On a conscious level, Maria acknowledged that there was no official requirement for her to teach any specific literature for any specific number of hours; that the syllabus was only loosely based on departmental and school guidelines and that if she did not cover the whole syllabus, she would suffer no repercussions. Nevertheless, she felt a sort of internal obligation to both teach literature extensively and try to follow and finish her own syllabus. It is possible that these beliefs were related to a tacit sense of obligation that she shared with colleagues and to the importance that was placed on literature and on a synthetic syllabus (i.e. syllabus based on a list of discrete items) in her own language learning experiences. These collective beliefs about contextual factors are discussed in more details in the Discussion chapter.

5.7 Beliefs about learners

Maria held beliefs about various issues concerning her learners; however, the most crucial ones that emerged clearly from the data were related to the learners' emotional and motivational needs and to their listening difficulties.

As for the former, Maria's approach to listening as a success experience appeared to originate in her beliefs about the learners' causes for successes and failures. Indeed, she repeated in various interviews that some learners had simply more of a natural aptitude to "select sounds" and more of a "musical ear". Further, she explained that the learners had a tendency to give up when faced with listening, which then fed into a feeling of frustration and a lowered sense of self-concept. Overall then, she appeared to attribute her learners' failures and successes to an internal, stable, but non-controllable cause (innate ability) as well as an internal, unstable and controllable cause (effort).

She referred to these two causes in conjunction when explaining listening failure in her students: for Maria, the frustration and lowered self-concept resulting from this failure ought to be avoided and it was her role to prevent this. She achieved this in two ways: first, as previously discussed, by lowering task demands (e.g. being content with only global understanding, carrying out lengthy pre-listening activities) and second, by implementing a series of "positive practices". Her positive practices included differentiating questions based on the expected response of each learner, offering continuous praise, switching to Italian when she noticed the students were struggling and letting students work in pairs and groups. When talking about a student who she thought was struggling to understand but did not ask for her help, Maria explained:

> Maria: Eleonora will never ask. She'd rather leave [the exercise] blank. So next time I need to ask her something very easy, not too obvious, but something that gives her a positive boost.
>
> Chiara: so when they tell you they don't understand or can't answer a question, you try to give them a simpler task.
>
> Maria: yes, exactly. If it's a very difficult question, I let the ones who feel like answering answer. If you noticed, I often have them work in groups because that way you're never alone. In class dynamics, [thinking] "I couldn't do anything" leaves you feeling lost. (MI2)

Maria thus appeared to be responsive to her learners' emotional needs. She reported trying to create a safe environment for her learners, staving off failure as much as possible and working with what she described as a humanistic, empathetic and learner-centred approach. Interestingly, the effects of these

practices seemed to be reflected in the learners' beliefs, as discussed in section 5.10.

Her responsive approach to learners' emotional and motivational needs was also consistent with how she conceived of their listening difficulties. In her interviews, when asked about the sources of difficulty in the listening tasks observed, she referred most frequently to the students' tendency to "give up" when faced with difficulty; she then cited unknown words and difficult accents as the second and third most pressing issues. She also mentioned difficulties with normalisation (whereby at the start of a listening activity, the listener adjusts to the speaker's voice), word segmentation, recognising the speaker's tone and task requirements. Her approach to these difficulties was consistent throughout: rather than unduly exposing learners to difficulties, she reduced the task difficulty with vocabulary pre-teaching, a preference for scripted audios in "standard" British English and repeated replays of the audio – to avoid failure and build the self-concept needed to overcome the temptation to give up.

5.8 Summary

Maria's main beliefs and practices concerning listening can be summarised as follows:

- Tasks and task demands were simplified by means such as lengthy pre-listening activities. This was meant to reduce task complexity and ultimately prevent students from failing.

- Classroom listening was mostly a means to teach grammar and vocabulary. It had more of a linguistic purpose than a content-based one and it was overall viewed as a way to provide the learners with a success experience.

- Throughout her practices, the need for a structured approach with specific boundaries to learning emerged as a key theme, also reflected in her synthetic syllabus.

- Maria showed critical engagement with the contextual factors impinging on her work. Exams emerged as the main contextual factor influencing her practices and highlighting how a contrast between two beliefs (i.e. criticism of exams and future needs of students to take these exams) was realised in the classroom.

- Much of her practice can be connected to her beliefs about the students' self-concept as closely connected to feelings of failure and determining the learners' willingness to persevere in listening tasks.

5.9 Learners' beliefs and practices

This section examines the beliefs and practices of Maria's learners related to their listening as they emerged from questionnaire, interview and observational data. After describing the learners' reported listening activities in class and in their leisure time, this section discusses their enjoyment, perceived difficulty and importance of listening, and reasons for this importance. Finally, listening self-concept, attributions and difficulties are discussed.

5.9.1 Learners' profiles

The group was composed of twenty third-year students, with nine females and eleven males. The three learners interviewed were Roberto, a learner with very high listening self-concept and adaptive attributions (e.g. effort, strategies); Pietro, a learner with fairly high listening self-concept and adaptive attributions, and Lina, a learner with low listening self-concept and overall maladaptive attributions (e.g. luck, task difficulty).

5.9.2 Learners' reported practices

Maria's learners were asked how often they did different kinds of listening activities in class and Table 5.2 summarises their responses.

Table 5.2: Learners' answers to the question "How often are the following activities done in class? Choose your answer (1= never; 5= very often)"

Classroom activity	Mean
Listening to teacher	5.0
Listening tests	4.9
Textbook audio	4.6
Watching video	2.8
Listening to songs	1.8
Watching films	1.1

Learners provided further evidence in both the survey and their interviews that, as observed, textbook materials were the main source of listening practice in the classroom (excluding the teacher). Conversely, the frequency of video use, compared to the other items on this list, was reportedly lower for this group than for the other classes in the study. What also stands out in the data above is that 100% of students reported listening to their teacher "very often"; while striking, however, this figure does not substantially differ from the overall 91% of students in this study who reported listening to their teacher very often,

indicating that teacher talk perceived by students as a frequent feature in English classes. What does instead represent a difference between Maria's group and the totality of student participants is how often they were tested: 100% of Maria's students reported being tested on their listening very often or often, while only 60% overall did, suggesting that listening tests may have been (or may have been perceived as being) a more frequent occurrence in Maria's classes.

In terms of listening in their leisure time, Maria's learners seemed to slightly lag behind their peers in this research. Only 50% of them reported listening to English for leisure often or very often (against 69% overall). When probed about the materials they used, their answers showed that songs were the most popular source, while sources such as videos and films were less used.
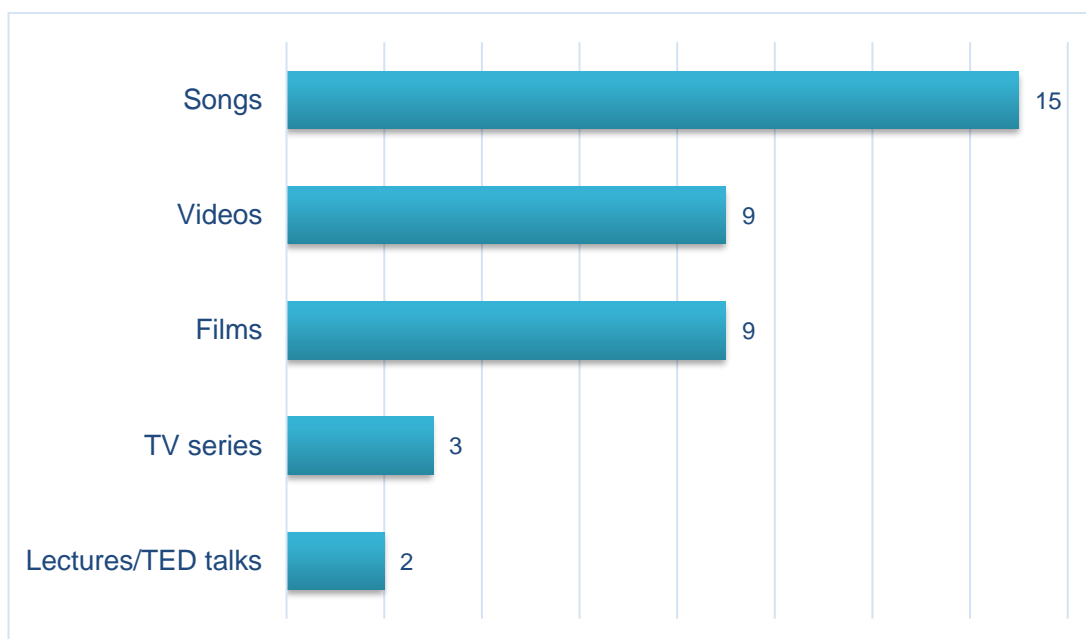
Figure 5.1: Out of class listening activities reported by learners

Because music can be enjoyed without requiring deep processing of the input, this table might suggest that Maria's learners engaged with less challenging materials than some of the other participants. Nevertheless, when elaborating on this issue in his interview, Pietro reported actually enjoying the challenge of understanding lyrics, which was worth it for its motivational value and because it allowed access to real English:

> Chiara: what type of music do you listen to?

> Pietro: if there's a genre I prefer, it's probably hip hop. I like it because it's intriguing... hearing words which are different from standard classroom English, because there's slang in there, so you then look at the written lyrics and you can grasp those shades of meaning.

> Chiara: so you go and look up the lyrics.

Pietro: yes, very often, because... I'm curious about them.

Chiara: and when you listen, do you understand?

Pietro: well, yes, the general meaning... not on the first try; you first listen to the rhythm, but if you like a song, you try to use your head to analyse the lyrics to try and grasp the beauty of the song as much as you can. So sometimes... you try to get the general meaning straightaway. (PI1)

This extract underlines a key point made by Lina and Roberto as well: listening to authentic English in their spare time was a way to familiarise themselves with "real" English, perceived as different from school English. As Lina put it, listening to songs and trying to watch films, with subtitles if necessary, was an effective way to listen

> *with a real purpose; you're interested and you want to learn, understand, maybe sing, so you want to know what they say, you want to know the words, while in school it's more... you do it and it's over, there's no follow-up. (LI1)*

This quote also highlights the issue of using listening as a tool to learn vocabulary. As discussed in the next section, this emerged as a key concern for Maria's learners.

5.9.3 Listening: enjoyment, importance, difficulty

Based on survey data, the learners in this class appeared to perceive listening as approximately as difficult and important as the as the other students in the sample. This finding was corroborated in their interviews. However, listening was enjoyed slightly less than the average (as per Figure 5.2) and it ranked as the third most enjoyed skill for this group (as opposed to the first overall).
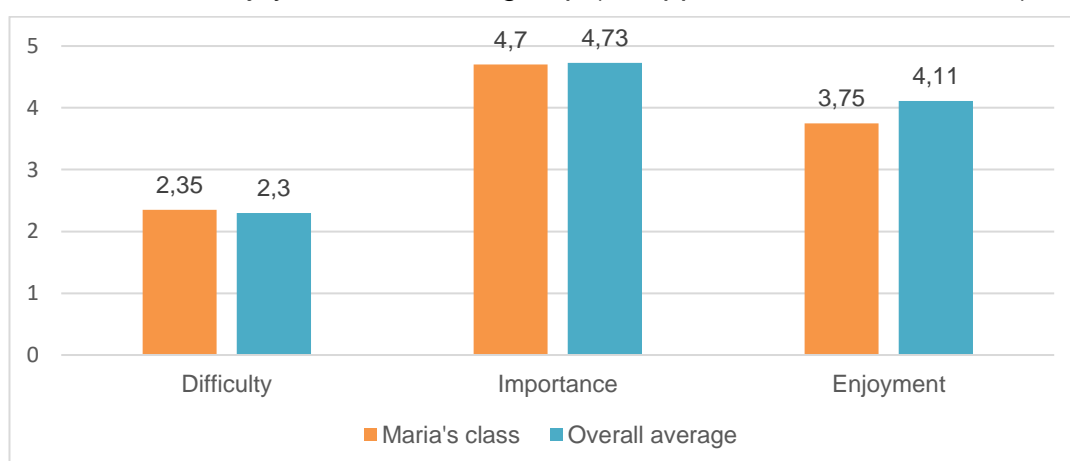
Figure 5.2: Perceived difficulty, importance and enjoyment of English listening on a scale from 1 to 5 (mean values)

When asked to give their reasons for the importance they attributed to learning to listen, the two most commonly mentioned reasons were communication and learning the language:

Table 5.3: Reasons for perceived importance of learning to listen

Reason	Frequency
To understand and be able to answer in conversations	13
To learn the language: pronunciation, vocabulary, speaking	11
For future work	5

This signals a difference with other cases, as the two purposes of being able to understand in a conversation and using it as an instrument for learning the language were mentioned almost an equal number of times, suggesting that an instrumental view of listening as a tool for pronunciation and vocabulary may have been more common in Maria's group than, for example, in Giulia's (where developing listening was viewed mostly as a way to learn to communicate). In his interview, Roberto clarified this need:

> *Roberto: for me it's very important because by listening you can understand the right pronunciation of words, idioms and all those little things that make your English better. Because what you learn in school isn't necessarily spoken English, it's more something that's grammatically correct. So I think that listening helps memorising this.*
>
> *Chiara: listening at home?*
>
> *Roberto: yes, and the ones in class help memorise words and pronunciation. (RI1)*

This quote highlights two recurrent themes in the interviews. First, the value of listening to and learning "real", spoken English: by marking the difference between the English learned in school and the English actually spoken by people, Roberto emphasised again the value of having access to realistic, perhaps less scripted, sources. This appears to reflect Maria's claims that she taught only a certain type of formal English in class. Secondly, the learners express a belief in the importance of expanding their vocabulary and they saw listening as a way to do this.

It is also interesting to notice how some of Maria's learners saw listening comprehension as an important skill for their future careers, despite being only at the beginning of their third *liceo* year. This was explained well by Pietro, who, despite not seeing the direct real-life applications of listening at the time of the interview, felt motivated by and could envision future prospects:

Pietro: at any time, if you live in a medium-big town, there may be foreigners or other kinds of people asking for information, and that's an example of why listening is important. Thinking of the future, it's very well-known that in the job market, English is very important so even in a job interview you have to be good at listening before you can reply. I think being able to listen and understand is the thing that comes first. Replying comes by itself if you have [this] skill... plus, in your relationships, if you meet a foreigner and you see there's a connection there, and you develop a friendship, it's useful.

Chiara: does this happen to you?

Pietro: it doesn't happen too often now because I don't have that many chances to interact with foreigners. I don't travel, I live in a small secluded village, it's not touristic, so in a sense, I think about the future. Especially when I start looking for a job in engineering. (PI1)

5.9.4 Listening self-concept and attributions

In terms of their perceived ability to understand spoken English, Maria's learners rated themselves only slightly less capable than the average, with a mean value of 3.2 on a scale from 1 to 5 against an overall mean of 3.4. A closer look at percentages reveals that a fairly high proportion of Maria's students defined themselves as not good or not at all good (30%), compared to the lower overall figure of 17%. When asked more specifically whether they could complete most listening activities in school, 70% of Maria's learners answered positively, in line with the overall average of 71% for the whole student population in this study. This gives an insight into an issue that emerged from learner interviews, that is, the criteria students used to gauge their success at classroom listening. Indeed, when asked to elaborate in their interviews, Pietro and Lina indicated that while they felt fairly confident in their ability to complete classroom listening tasks, they had felt less prepared to tackle real-life speech, both unidirectional (films, TV series) and bidirectional (conversations). They referred to their difficulties coping with complex, unknown topics:

Lina: spoken English… I mean, when it comes to grammar, you study it and you can apply it, but I find it more difficult to speak or listen to a person I've not listened to before. Like, with the teacher, I'm used to listening to her, so I understand, but listening to a native speaker I've never heard before, I struggle.

Chiara: does this happen in your life?

Lina: yes. Like last year we went to Ireland and we stayed with host families and went to school. In school, the language was a lot easier, so to speak, because they explained simpler things that you could understand. With subjects, like history or geography, you know what they're talking about. [..] The difficulties were mostly in the family

because their way of speaking is faster, they don't realise they have to slow down and that happens to us speaking Italian too. (LI1)

Pietro also confirmed this:

Chiara: when you watch videos or TV series, do you use subtitles?

Pietro: it depends on the series. If it's a more demanding series…

Chiara: for example?

Pietro: for example... [smiles] a series with a certain moral, with ethical contents, or where you need to take the information you already know from the world, from life... a series set in a specific historical context, normally you retrieve information you know from school. Like House of Cards.

Chiara: and what differences do you see between the listening you do at home and the listening you do in the classroom?

Pietro: it's more specific in a sense, so you focus only on that thing... for example, House of Cards has a strong political and socioeconomic background so you focus on that field a lot, perhaps neglecting more general daily life aspects, like simpler dialogues you do in class. (PI1)

While the learners did not report struggling with topics when asked about their classroom listening, this emerged as a key concern in terms of listening outside the classroom. The highly scaffolded classroom listening on accessible topics may have created a gap between the students' self-concept (and possibly listening ability) for classroom activities, in which they felt more successful, and for real-life listening, in which they may have been less prepared to deal with the incoming speech due to, among other things, a lack of preparation and background knowledge on specific topics.

The issue of the benchmark used by students to define their listening success was also evident in their attributions as elicited in survey responses. When asked to explain why they were successful or unsuccessful in classroom listening, nine of the learners who answered positively explicitly cited their efforts in developing their skills, while five cited classroom tasks, claiming that they were able to answer questions correctly and complete the homework assigned by the teacher. One cited the use of appropriate strategies. Conversely, among the students who reported not managing to complete most classroom activities successfully, three cited innate inability and two cited task difficulty. Although both groups referred to tasks, the higher self-concept students seemed to be discussing task demands as being manageable, while the lower self-concept groups referred features of the input described as more unpredictable, such as pronunciation and speed. This appears to indicate that some students gauged their success based on the extent to which they

succeeded in completing the scaffolded and structured activities assigned by the teacher.

Further evidence to illuminate this issue was provided by Lina. She reported struggling to understand spoken English more than Roberto and Pietro and she frequently pointed to difficult accents and fast speech as the main reasons for her breakdowns in comprehension. However, she also held strategies in high regard as a potential source of success, claiming that she had not learned how to apply the right strategies to English listening yet, despite having done so in learning other languages.

5.9.5 Listening difficulties

In terms of listening difficulties, the questionnaire data appear to confirm two main findings. First, that the task formats associated with listening did not seem to pose a major problem for Maria's learners, as task variables were rated among the least problematic issues. Second, that grappling with text and speaker features, such as words and pronunciation, was a more prominent problem, as evident in Table 5.4:

Table 5.4: Learners' listening difficulties based on questionnaire responses (n= 20)

Difficulty	Strongly agree/agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly disagree/agree
Unfamiliar words make it difficult for me to understand	13	4	3
Difficult grammatical structures make it hard for me to understand	12	3	5
I find it difficult to understand speakers with an unknown accent	11	6	3
Multiple choice questions are easier to answer than essay questions	11	4	5
I find it difficult to understand the meaning of a long spoken text	9	2	9
I find it difficult to understand spoken text when I'm not interested in its content	7	7	5
I find it difficult to listen and write answers at the same time	6	6	8
I find it difficult to read comprehension questions in full if there is little time between questions	5	9	6
Listening and reading questions at the same time is difficult for me	5	5	10
I have difficulty understanding unfamiliar topics	4	11	5

These data warrant some consideration. Firstly, interview data confirmed that Maria's learners struggled with word recognition, even of known words. In Lina's view, this was linked to accents:

> *Lina: we also did some listening in Australian and in that case the speed and voice tone changed a lot. Even the pronunciation of a very simple word was totally, like another sound, but the word was that…*
>
> *Chiara: so you didn't recognise it.*
>
> *Lina: I didn't.*
>
> *Chiara: but did you know it was still a word you knew or did you feel like you didn't know the word?*
>
> *Lina: I felt like I didn't even know it. Then if I listened again or when someone told me, I thought "oh right, that's what it was!" (LI1)*

Indeed, the three learners interviewed elaborated on problematic speaker variables, citing accents, speed of delivery and identifying speaker's tone. Further, Pietro reported problems with features of connected speech such as weak forms. He did not refer to them by their name, signalling that he may not have received any explicit instruction in recognising them, but he perceived them nonetheless:

> *Chiara: did [the speakers in the listening] garble their words today?*
>
> *Pietro: maybe Martha [one of the speakers] did, in the second part. There are a lot of linkers and prepositions and some of them… it almost sounds like they don't say them […] for example the articles or the conjunctions, sometimes it sounds like they skip them or they're barely audible. This is natural, we do it in Italian if you hear someone speaking fast.*
>
> *Chiara: does this make it harder to understand?*
>
> *Pietro: definitely (PI2)*

A further issue worth exploring is grammar complexity. Sixty percent of Maria's learners agreed or strongly agreed that this represented a problem, against only 44% overall. Although they felt this was a pressing issue, because the purpose of listening activities was often to detect grammatical structures in the text or study them starting from the text, they may have perceived grammar as being crucial to their comprehension because of the teacher's focus on it. For example, in Observation 4, Maria wanted to focus on the future perfect, of which three instances occurred in the text (Appendix 11). When queried about how she felt the listening had gone for her, Lina gave this explanation:

> *Chiara: What did you think of the listening you did today?*
>
> *Lina: so so, because we hadn't done the grammar things of the unit that we did today and we went straight to the listening. So grammatically, some things like the future, since we hadn't reviewed*

*them I felt a little taken aback at first. I couldn't understand some
things. (LI2)*

Lina may have conflated her failure to identify or master the future perfect with a
failure at listening. This extract also gives an insight into two other problems
widely reported in interviews: normalisation (the process of adjusting when
hearing a speaker for the first time) and not having been prepared enough for a
listening. The former was reported by the three interviewed students as one of
several issues when processing audio recordings. Other than a difficulty relating
to becoming used to the voices and the English, and consequently "missing" the
beginning, the students cited issues concentrating, keeping their concentration
and forgetting what was said previously in the listening. Unlike other cases,
these processing issues did not seem to be related to listening anxiety, which
none of the learners cited as a substantial difficulty.

Finally, not having been prepared "enough" appeared to be a concern for Lina
because when she was prepared, this helped her understand:

> *Chiara: In terms of the work you did before listening, you had done a
> reading before and then you worked on the vocabulary*

> *Lina: That helped, because both talked about the same topics so
> some of the words I had read in the text, I found them in the listening.
> For example both the reading and listening talked about the North
> Pole, the environment, the risks and the dangers and the things that
> have to be safeguarded. So that made me feel calmer. (LI2)*

5.9.6 Listening strategies

In order to cope with the speaker and text variables that appeared to be
prominent difficulties, Maria's learners reported implementing a number of
listening strategies. Based on their interviews, the most popular type of strategy
was of a top-down compensatory nature: all learners reported guessing,
deducing, interpreting meaning, using background knowledge and
reconstructing meaning in their minds. The other group of strategies cited by all
learners, albeit to a lesser extent, was, perhaps unsurprisingly, related to word
recognition: listening out for specific words, listening out for key words and
drawing on words learned in the pre-listening phase.

As previously mentioned, Maria's class was the only one in the study in which
listening anxiety did not seem to represent a substantial difficulty, perhaps
linked to the efforts made by Maria to create a positive environment and simplify
listening activities. Nevertheless, some socio-affective strategies were
mentioned by both Lina and Roberto, despite having very different levels of self-
concept. Roberto mentioned coping with the messiness of his notes; Lina often
talked to herself in an attempt to concentrate, stay calm and motivate herself.

Although she was not anxious about listening *per se*, Lina did report a high level of test anxiety, which sometimes impinged on how she approached classroom listening:

> *Chiara: How did you feel during the listening?*
>
> *Lina: I was fairly calm because it wasn't a test. We had more chances to re-listen and we had the chance to read the transcript after, so I thought if I don't understand something, I can read it or listen to it at home. (LI2)*
>
> *Chiara: if I say listening, what's the typical classroom activity you think of?*
>
> *Lina: I think of a listening that's very scholastic, for scholastic purposes. We listen and the first thing I think is that this will be in the test so I focus a lot on specific words. (LI1)*

Tests appeared to be a central concern for Lina, influencing her levels of anxiety and leading her to focus on the vocabulary and grammar that she thought would be included in a future test. This implicit expectation, which may have led Lina to have some unnatural listening behaviour (i.e. trying to identify potentially important vocabulary and grammar in an audio rather than start by listening for gist) was confirmed in other students' interviews as well as Maria's, as discussed in section 5.10.2.

Finally, Pietro reported using a variety of strategies aimed at managing task mechanics (e.g. reading questions before listening; answering easier questions first; avoiding writing while listening) and Lina reported using strategies that helped her deal with the unpredictability of the structure of a text: making connections between different parts of a text, focusing on the beginning to facilitate subsequent comprehension, using prior knowledge of text type (e.g. an informal dialogue between two friends) to predict its structure and identifying the number of speakers straightaway.

5.9.7 Summary

In terms of their listening practices, Maria's learners claimed to use the textbook often in class and perceived listening tests as more frequent than the average across the cases, while they reported listening to English for leisure less frequently than the average. Although listening was not the most enjoyed skill, Maria's learners acknowledged its importance both as a tool for learning the language and as a skill for successful communication. They appeared to distinguish the more formal and "grammatically correct" English they heard in school from the "real" spoken English they could access outside of school. This distinction was connected to their feeling of higher self-concept for classroom listening than listening tasks in real life and to their reported difficulties. Indeed,

while tasks did not feature as a significant difficulty, this group seemed to struggle more with text and speaker variables and with the process of normalising speech. The strategies most widely applied were top-down strategies and word recognition strategies. Finally, Maria's learners did not appear to struggle with listening anxiety related to classroom activities; nevertheless, they reported using certain socioaffective strategies.

5.10 Maria and her learners: comparisons

Overall, the analysis of Maria's case revealed far more convergence than divergence between the teacher and her learners' beliefs. In this section, I discuss the most representative instances of this convergence, which emerged in three main forms: Maria's interpretations of her learners' listening practices; the learners' interpretations of Maria's teaching practices and their rationales; the correspondence between Maria's humanistic teaching and the learners' reported lack of classroom listening anxiety.

5.10.1   Maria's interpretations of her learners' practices

Maria showed a certain awareness of how her students listened to English. This was especially evident when she elaborated on their listening outside of the classroom and their listening difficulties. In terms of the former, she explained how her students did not listen to English outside of school too often and if they did, the work was mostly superficial because it related to songs:

> *Chiara: do they get used to [English] in class or outside the class?*
>
> *Maria: that's quite an issue. Some of them do it outside the class because they watch TV series on streaming, so some of them even develop an American accent in speaking […] but it's only few of them who exploit this outside of school. Many of them only in class, in the case of this class, aside from one of them, who however lived in Africa, in a naturalised English environment […]*
>
> *Chiara: so outside of school, what do they do in English? If they don't watch videos and such?*
>
> *Maria: they listen to music, that's it. They often listen, they don't even look up the lyrics. Some of them don't even... most of them in this class in particular, yes. (MI3)*

This corresponded to the learners' questionnaire data as discussed in section 5.9.2: Maria's learners listened to English for leisure less frequently than the average in this study and they showed a clear preference for songs as a source. Nevertheless, Maria may have underestimated the extent to which some learners engaged with the lyrics in the songs, as Pietro explained in section 5.9.2.

Maria also correctly identified most of the main listening difficulties reported by her learners in the survey and interviews: unknown words, accents, normalisation and a tendency to "give up" (arguably similar to what the learners called "losing concentration" or "interest"). The only listening difficulties reported by learners that Maria never mentioned in her interviews were related to managing the unpredictability of the text (i.e. not having been prepared enough, dealing with an unfamiliar text structure). This may have been connected to the fact that she implemented various teaching practices to actually limit this unpredictability, so she may not have perceived it as a major issue.

5.10.2 Learners' interpretations of teaching practices

Maria's learners interpreted her teaching and rationales behind activities in ways that resembled her beliefs. First, as previously mentioned, Maria's learners were aware of the tacit expectation, confirmed by Maria herself, that they should recognise target structures and vocabulary in the classroom listening and that these would be included in upcoming tests:

> Chiara: do you think any of this listening will go in a test?

> Roberto: Very likely, definitely the future perfect in terms of verbs and probably the word "attitude" in the vocabulary bit in which we're given a definition and we have to identify the word. I'm sure of these two. Perhaps also the word "ecosystem". (RI2)

Maria and her learners also shared similar beliefs about the English language. Indeed, there is scope for arguing that what Maria defined as the formal English that she taught in school (see section 5.5), they described as "school English" – a grammatically correct, perhaps more scripted and clearer variety compared to the "real" English of songs and films.

Finally, Maria's beliefs about the importance of vocabulary learning and using listening as a springboard for linguistic analysis also seemed to have reached her students. This was evident in the questionnaire data, where listening to learn the language was approximately as important as listening for communication purposes. Further, in their interviews, the learners stressed again the importance of learning as much vocabulary as possible and analysing language:

> Chiara: Do you like this textbook?

> Pietro: Yes because it's not too full of those things that are used less commonly in a language but there are thorough linguistic analyses of what we should know. (PI2)

5.10.3   Learners' emotional states

Maria's concern with the learners' emotional wellbeing was evident from her many "positive practices" and her belief that she should attempt to prevent failures for her learners. Although it is difficult to determine direct causal relationships, it is noteworthy that Maria's case was the only one in this study in which no interviewed learner reported feeling listening-specific anxiety in the classroom. Even a learner such as Lina, who perceived herself as a weaker listener, referred to feeling positive in the classroom, as long as tests were not involved.

5.11 Chapter summary

Overall, Maria's teaching of listening seemed to be oriented towards providing all learners with an experience of success to enhance their self-concept. She sought to achieve this by conducting carefully structured listening activities, mostly based on the textbook, and implementing positive practices aimed at creating a safe environment. However, she also simplified tasks and reduced task demands, ultimately providing learners with highly scaffolded and accessible listening. While this may have achieved optimal results on an emotional level, as learners did not report suffering from listening anxiety, it may also have created two different dimensions of beliefs and expectations for the learners: one for school and one for real life. Indeed, learners seemed to have different levels of self-concept for classroom listening, for which they felt more prepared, and for real life, in which their self-concept was lower. Learners appeared to distinguish between the English they heard in school and the one in real life, almost as if they were two separate language varieties: therefore, when listening to "real English", they struggled especially with all the aspects of listening that they could not control, such as speaker variables and complex topics. Mutual influences were visible in the beliefs of Maria and her learners, though some evidence of divergence also emerged.

The next chapter explores Giulia's case, revealing a radically different set of practices and beliefs in the teacher and her learners.

Chapter 6 Giulia

This chapter presents the findings from Giulia's case. After introducing the context of the case, I discuss Giulia's teaching practices and beliefs concerning listening. I then outline my analysis of the learners' beliefs and discuss comparisons between teachers and learners.

6.1 Context

Giulia chose a fourth-year class of 22 *liceo classico* learners to participate in the research. She had taught this class since their second year, so she was well-acquainted with them. As mentioned in the context chapter, *liceo classico* students are normally interested in classics and pursuing university studies. The class had three weekly hours of English. Unlike most other teachers in this study, Giulia did not distinguish between the hours dedicated to "language" and "literature". Indeed, she developed language skills by studying current events, politics, civics and some literature, following a loose syllabus. She designed her syllabus following flexible school and national guidelines; in it, she emphasised critical thinking skills as the main desired outcome and outlined some historical and literary macro-themes to be covered. No language textbooks were used as Giulia was firmly against them: she used only authentic materials, thanks to the interactive whiteboard, laptop, Wi-Fi connection and audio system available in the classroom. When Giulia stepped into the classroom, her learners knew that they had to form three rows of desks and move them closer to the teacher so that she could monitor them and keep their attention.

6.2 Teacher profile

Giulia had over thirty years of teaching experience in a career she had wanted to pursue since she was a child. She self-studied English in secondary school and went on to study a Master's Degree in Pedagogy with a specialisation in Modern Foreign Languages, including English, and spent her summers working in England. Although her studies did not include a practicum, she felt that the focus on pedagogy helped her train as a teacher. She also participated in short in-service training seminars throughout her career. Prior to joining her current school, she spent ten years teaching primary school and literacy in her hometown's prisons.

6.3 Listening instruction

This section discusses how Giulia taught listening and how she made sense of her practices; thus, excerpts from classroom observation are presented along with extracts from interviews where Giulia explains her teaching.

6.3.1 Pre-listening

In all the classroom observations, Giulia started the lesson by playing an authentic video for the students. Unlike the other teachers in this study, she never did any pre-listening activities such as schemata activation or vocabulary brainstorming. In her view, such activities were detrimental for two reasons. The first is one of the many ways in which she felt critical of the school system in which she operated and from which she tried to set herself apart:

> *Giulia: one of the main flaws in the school system is its predictability: most activities are so widely predictable and pre-announced that the students just rest on their laurels in a calm routine. "I will have an oral test on Pirandello, [I'll] study it, fine, I'll study it today". So you already know it. This reduces your attention span, while the shock effect is crucial because it forces you to think "oh my God, what is this stuff? I have to understand it!" (GI2)*

The second reason is somewhat related to this belief that the school system produced students that were passive in their learning: if they knew something about the video before listening, they would use their vocabulary and world knowledge to overcompensate for their gaps in understanding, rather than actively making an effort to concentrate on what the text was saying:

> *Giulia: they need to have nothing on their mind [before listening], otherwise they tend to see in the video what they studied beforehand. Sometimes, when I do video-based tests, they don't say what the video says in their answers, but what they know that the video is about. And I say you know, that wasn't said in the video. It's true, but it wasn't in the video. They can't distinguish between these two things because, again, they're very passive. (GI3)*

It is thus clear how top-down compensation processes, generally regarded in the literature as part of the processes for successful listening, were not held in high regard in Giulia's belief system, while her belief about learners' passive attitudes appeared influential in her practices.

6.3.2 While-listening

During the classroom observations, Giulia first played the whole video or an extract from a video once, or twice if she deemed the video more challenging than usual. The videos were on average three minutes long. She then proceeded to play the video again, pausing it approximately every twenty seconds to ask the learners questions in English. This process continued for the whole class.

While listening, the only task that the learners had was to watch and make notes. This was so routinised that Giulia either did not give any instructions about the task, or did so only briefly:

> *Giulia: so this is a listening com… com...*
>
> *Student 1: comprehension.*
>
> *Giulia: yes and obviously you are supposed to… Valerio?*
>
> *Valerio: take notes.*
>
> *Giulia: of course, about what you'll see and hear. (GO3)*

In her interviews, Giulia confirmed that making notes was the only task that she normally assigned to her learners. Contrary to the other teachers in this study, she was reluctant to assign comprehension questions to guide the students through their listening, opting instead to ask questions *a posteriori*. Again, this was linked to her belief that predictability must be eradicated from school activities. Further, because students in her view were so passive in their learning, she saw it as her role to keep their attention high.

This need to keep the students focused at all times was central in Giulia's work, leading her to code-switch, change her voice tone, avoid pair or group work and have students sit near her:

> *Giulia: I care about the focus being on me not because I'm self-centred or because I think I'm the source of knowledge. This also explains the way that the classroom layout works, which is one of the main reasons I disagree with my colleagues. Their classroom layout, which you probably had when you were in school, is not what I need. I need to see them pay attention; I need them to sit in front of my desk. If they lie on the wall while I'm playing a video, they won't listen. (GI4)*

6.3.3 Post-listening

After playing the entire video once or twice, Giulia played it again in smaller sections, asking questions to specific learners. In the classes observed, the questions only rarely required in-depth comprehension or accurate decoding

of the input; more frequently, they focused on grammatical structures, vocabulary, pronunciation, aspects of background knowledge related to the video or notions from other subjects. This extract from Observation 1 exemplifies these types of questions: after showing the class a short news report about Hurricane Michael once (ABC News, 2018), Giulia proceeded with her post-listening (though arguably, since she paused the recording so frequently, this might also be classed as "while-listening"):

Giulia: I think that's enough, I'm not going to show you the whole... the whole… Marcella, this is a...?

Marcella: footage.

Giulia: a book, a movie, it's a new… a new…?

Student 1: news report.

Giulia: yes, mademoiselle Marta, from Congo? Uganda? Buccinasco?

Marta: Florida.

Giulia: yes, which is one of the…?

Student 2: of the 50 states.

Giulia: yes, exactly. Recently, monsieur Marco...

Marco: has stroken.

Giulia: really? Stroken?

Marco: stroke.

Giulia: a stroke is what you're going to give Ms Giulia!

[students laugh]

Giulia: recently this hurricane has…

Student 3: struck… Florida.

Giulia: Daniele, who's Michael?

Daniele: the reporter.

Giulia: the reporter? "I'm Michael and I'm reporting from Florida?" Mademoiselle Cristina?

Cristina: it's the hurricane.

Giulia: yes, it's the ni…?

Cristina: the nickname.

Giulia: yes, these phenomena, these hurricanes are given nicknames… this hurricane was named Michael. Let me replay a section of the video.

[Giulia replays 4 seconds]

Giulia: as you can imagine, Rosa, the hurricane has stopped so he's reporting on the dam... the dam...

Rosa: the damage.

Giulia: yes [plays another section] at 55 miles per hour, Enrico, how much is that?

Enrico: about 88 km.

Giulia: approximately. Definitely, Marta, very strrrr... very strrr....

Marta: very strong?

Giulia: wiii... [gestures]

Marta: winds.

Giulia: they [whistles]

[silence]

G: I'll show you in a minute.

[Giulia shows another 10 seconds]

Giulia: why does the speaker talk about higher ground?

Student 4: because there was a street out of the hotel.

Giulia: yes, so… higher ground?

Student 4: it was the upper part...

Giulia: of what? Does anyone know, Francesco? By the way, this is what happens in Italy as well…

Student 5: because there was a flood?

Giulia: /flɒd/? because you have /blɒd/ in your veins? (GO1)

This extract exemplifies the structure and dynamics of all the classes observed: the interactions were essentially only between teacher and individual learners; the class was high-paced, with the teacher retaining control over who spoke and quickly switching between learners to answer questions; learners spoke frequently and in short turns, with the teacher often feeding them word stems or miming words.

Giulia used her questions to home in on certain grammar points, such as the past participle of the verb "to strike" or, in Observation 3, the difference between modals "can" and "may":

Giulia: this is more of a linguistic point than something related to Huawei [the topic of the video] because they tend to always use "can" and they never use "may".

Chiara: Was it a topic you covered recently?

Giulia: no… As I said, I don't use grammar books with them, we only do grammar by drawing on situations such as this one. Sometimes I draw on things like this to talk about a grammar point. Ninety-nine percent of the time they use the word can, so you find [that] for them, the difference between can and may is…

> *As you will have understood, I don't hold textbooks in very high regard, because they present them as being interchangeable […] but that's not how it is, so when I see this difference I tend to highlight it as I know that it's difficult for them. (GI3)*

Giulia explained several times how grammar, as well as vocabulary and pronunciation, had to emerge from texts (preferably oral texts) and not be pre-determined by the teacher. This may also be linked to her rejection of her language learning experiences, in a phenomenon documented in other studies as "anti-apprenticeship of observation" (Moodie, 2016, p.29):

> *Giulia: I have great memories of my teachers, they really helped, but methodologically speaking, it was a very old and traditional methodology. Very textbook-driven and based on grammar rules, exercises and stuff like that… which of course I did, but it was useful for me to decide I wouldn't teach that way. (GI1)*

This belief in what can be defined as emergent teaching was consistent with her overall view of language teaching, which she described as

> *an inductive, performance-based method […] a problem-solving based method. (GI1)*

She saw her teaching as based on problem-solving and rooted in authentic language, preparing learners for the demands of the real world. This was also why she frequently embedded notions from other subjects in her classes:

> *Chiara: I noticed you use listening to do other things such as grammar, vocabulary, geography, maths even.*

> *Giulia: it's all connected to my view on teaching my subject. As I said, there's this obsolete view of our subject as teaching language and literature, as if we were ambassadors of the Anglo-Saxon culture in the world and we have to show how nice the Anglo-Saxon world is by talking about Byron and Turner and so on. Well, I believe this view is a little old: we need to use English to investigate any field of knowledge. Not to explain things, as I have no physics, maths or philosophy background, but they have to be able to tell me the temperature today in English. (GI2)*

As is clear from this extract, Giulia rejected conceptions of language teaching that she deemed common but outdated. In fact, her way of making sense of her work was often to distance herself from what she saw as "fatal flaws" in the system (an expression she used 21 times in her interviews) and explain how her practice was different. This was part of her overall sense of agency in how she operated within and managed to limit the influence of the contextual structures around her. This attitude manifested itself crucially in

how she understood the very subject she taught differently from her colleagues:

> *Chiara: is teaching literature compulsory?*
>
> *Giulia: no, that's the mistake! Our subject is called "English language and culture", not language and literature. Literature is part of culture; it's not all culture is. I realise, even when I work as an external examiner in esami di maturità [upper secondary schools' exit exams], that it's all about literature. It's a list of authors. I think that's a fatal mistake. (GI1)*

Aside from questions related to grammar and other subjects, Giulia did at times ask comprehension questions. As is clear from the extract above from Observation 1, these questions would sometimes elicit background knowledge on the video – for example, when she asked about Florida (the location of the video), a piece of information that was readily available to the learners thanks to the maps displayed in the video, thus not requiring deep engagement with the oral input. On other occasions, however, the comprehension questions were more challenging, such as when she asked what "higher ground" referred to. The video said, "people were advised to seek refuge on higher ground", but the students' comprehension of this seemed to be only partial. Thanks to Giulia's help, her continuous "feeding" (e.g. word stems), and the learners' own world knowledge (i.e. of what happens as a consequence of floods), they managed to build an answer together. Two points are thus worth discussing in relation to this: first, Giulia's contributions appeared to be an important part of the learners' comprehension of the input, somehow making their engagement with the input and their decoding of sounds and words less of a necessity. Second, despite avoiding schemata activation activities because she feared learners would overcompensate, world knowledge did seem to be a crucial component in completing the post-listening tasks set by Giulia. Her classes were essentially based on a process of collaborative, guided reconstruction of the main points in a video. She may formally have been against the use of background knowledge to fill in the gaps, but after playing the video once or twice, she did focus her learners' attention on aspects of background knowledge about the video:

> *Giulia: [points at an image of Donald Trump and Chinese diplomats] who are these? What is the relationship between them? (GO3)*

To her, this did not amount to a contradiction because she only did it after learners had already listened, thus fighting "predictability", and it also helped

the students find out more about the topic at hand, thus following her principle that language should be learned through meaningful content and expand the learners' knowledge. She also focused on the process of deduction, confirming what was observed in her classes: the focus was primarily on top-down processing, neglecting bottom-up, decoding skills (e.g. work on sounds, word recognition, transcription).

Vocabulary also seemed to be an important concern for her when asking learners questions. She often focused on the usage and pronunciation of words from the videos, without ever pre-determining what items she would cover. Developing vocabulary was one of the purposes for which Giulia taught listening (as explained in section 6.4). This was also evident from her expectation that learners reformulate whenever possible:

> *Giulia: another thing I ask them to do aside from listening is to never repeat the words of the speaker. This is needed to expand their vocabulary. They tend to repeat things using the same words in the video. I generally tell them right, you can do it but bear in mind this lowers your score in the test... So they know that the task is twofold: you first need to understand what they're saying, then repeat it but without recycling the same vocabulary. (GI2)*

This expectation is unsurprising, not only because the skill of reformulation is held in high regard in Italian *licei*, but also because Giulia used an ongoing, holistic method of evaluation, whereby the accuracy of learners' answers in class contributed to their overall final grade: their ability to reformulate and the language they used in doing so was part of Giulia's ongoing evaluation of each learner.

Overall, what emerges clearly from her post-listening practices is that Giulia used questions for a wide array of purposes (consolidating grammar vocabulary, reformulation skills, pronunciation, embedding notions from other subjects, testing comprehension, eliciting background knowledge), consistently with what she regarded as the main purposes for listening in the classroom, the topic of the following section.

6.4 Purposes of listening

Listening for developing the skill of listening may not have been the primary purpose for including listening in Giulia's classes. This was particularly the case for decoding skills: in Observation 3, for example, Giulia showed a video about Huawei and the US-China trade war (Wall Street Journal, 2018). In it, a Wall Street Journal reporter asked, "but what is Huawei?"; the

learners struggled to decode "Huawei", but rather than focus on this, Giulia opted for asking questions about who the speaker was:

> *Chiara: here you show another bit of video [shows extract of the class]. The video says, "but what exactly is Huawei?" You paused it and asked about the journalist. So I wondered, why a question on the journalist and not on what the video had just said?*
>
> *Giulia: Because they very often don't realise how important the source is in information. They are used to using their eyes a lot, like I was saying… [...] but they're not used to reflecting on things, but you need to understand that that is the point of view of the Wall Street Journal. So this journalist made a video which of course informs the audience but also needs to be in line with the political position of the paper. Of course I'm not going to delve into this topic, but you need to know who's speaking, and they take this for granted.*
>
> *Chiara: So in this case, asking who the journalist was was more important.*
>
> *Giulia: Yes. Because it has a higher educational value. Yes, you must convey that all information comes from a viewpoint and is never neutral… This is a general issue, which goes beyond listening comprehension. (GI3)*

Giulia thus used listening in her classes consistently with her overarching belief about the role of education, which should be to develop the learners' critical thinking skills (especially their ability to evaluate sources, as explained in her syllabus) and expand their knowledge of topics with which they may not be familiar and which they find challenging; this appeared more important than the development of listening as a skill.

Aside from using listening for content and critical thinking, Giulia also saw it as a tool to develop the students' vocabulary, to focus on emergent grammar and for the students to learn to cope with difficult pronunciations; indeed, as is explained in the following section, the relevance of the topic was the crucial factor in Giulia's decisions about what materials to use, trumping considerations about English varieties and leading her to use varieties deemed more unusual and difficult by the learners, for the sake of the content.

6.5 Listening materials and English varieties

The table below illustrates the features of the videos used by Giulia in each observation:

Table 6.1: Features of videos used by Giulia

Observation number	Source	Topic	English variety
1	ABC News	Hurricane Michael	American English
2	CBS News	The US midterms	American English
3	The Wall Street Journal	Huawei and the US-China trade war	American English
4	UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office	Hamsatu Allamin and her work supporting Boko Haram victims	Nigerian English

The videos were all authentic, they focused primarily on politics and current affairs and the preferred English variety was American English. Giulia's main criterion for choosing her videos was, in fact, their topic, which should be in line with her syllabus and be challenging:

> *Chiara: how do you normally plan your listening activities?*

> *Giulia: I normally... the listening is based on the syllabus, so their topics are mainly historical or political. Normally, when an interesting theme comes up, I look at the Washington Post videos, or use the BBC a lot, they have wonderful videos. I choose a video that can give them an opportunity to expand on their knowledge. (GI2)*

> *Giulia: something that sets me aside from my colleagues is that I don't believe the importance of something is given by how culturally advanced or sophisticated it is. I mean, I don't care about teaching Shakespeare, Keats or Byron. I don't think [students] become more spiritually elevated by doing this. It's far more important for them to know what happened between Trump and the woman who accused him of sexual assault. (GI1)*

As confirmed by Giulia in various interviews, the varieties were generally British or North American, but this was not an important criterion in her selection. What mattered to her was rather that the videos be "linguistically comprehensible" (GI2) and if the topic she chose was covered well in a video with less "common" varieties, she did it anyway and saw it as an opportunity for her students to learn to cope with such varieties. During Observation 4, she described Nigerian English as "broken English", aware that it was an added difficulty for her students:

> *Chiara: you characterise this as broken English. How come?*

> *Giulia: Well, because it's a way of... The people who believe they have a clear pronunciation use this expression when you try to*

speak English and you're not a native speaker. An English person would probably say the same about my English. So I meant to refer to the type of pronunciation of someone who speaks English not as a native language, like the person in the video. So from a grammatical point of view it was correct, and lexically too, but the pronunciation was very... Yes, non-standard. Different. Many words were pronounced strangely, if we look at the pronunciation on a dictionary, it was completely different. On the other hand, since it's a global language, you can end up having to face a South African or Kenyan pronunciation. (GI4)

This extract highlights how what mattered to Giulia was the authenticity of the input. Aside from avoiding speakers like "Italo-American mafia bosses from the Bronx" (GI2) because that may be too difficult for the students, she did not wish to shelter them from difficult listening or simplify task demands for them, because they must be ready to cope with real life. This also reveals how she acted free of constraints such as the B2 level that fourth-year students are supposed to work towards according to ministerial and school guidelines (MIUR, 2017). Giulia explained that she had no

obsession with the level, so an A1, A2, B1 listening... I don't believe in that. Of course, if you have to do a Cambridge certificate, fine, but in reality, I do this from the first year: they must be ready to face any English level. You can't tell a student "no, you're too young so you can't listen to this". From the very beginning, when you interact with the Anglo-Saxon world, you have to be able to understand what they say. (GI2)

This approach to listening as authentic and unencumbered by standard examination demands was reflected in her beliefs about assessment, as discussed in the following section.

6.6 Listening assessment

Giulia saw assessment as a holistic process encompassing both formal tests and ongoing informal evaluation of learners' behaviour and answers in class. She generally formally tested fourth-year students on their listening twice a year by playing an authentic video and having them make notes. She then dictated comprehension questions (mostly about details such as numbers and names) and gave learners about thirty seconds to answer each question before dictating the next question. Finally, she replayed the full video, giving learners a few minutes to review their answers. The learners knew that they should avoid using words from the video. Giulia knew that asking them to understand and reformulate was a double task but thought it a necessary one. She saw her tests as far more useful and communication-based than "the gap-fills" she believed her colleagues used.

As for the ongoing evaluation, Giulia's learners knew that their contributions in class were evaluated. Giulia often added a plus or minus to her students' record based on them. Final grades were thus the result of various considerations, including how the learners behaved in class (e.g. whether they participated actively). Grading was also one of the few aspects of Giulia's work that forced her to reckon with a contextual factor, as she explained the rationale for her assessment system to the parents. Nonetheless, this did not appear to influence her practices substantially.

I observed virtually no washback effect in Giulia's work. In her interviews, she identified *maturità* (i.e. the exit exam at the end of upper secondary school), Cambridge exams and INVALSI as the key tests for her learners. Nonetheless, the listening tasks in the observations did not resemble any exam tasks. She reported devoting no classroom time to exam preparation because she opposed the teaching-to-the-test attitude that she believed was so widespread in the school system. She also believed that the task format had no real bearing on students' performance in a listening test:

> *Chiara: I don't know if you're going to have them try some of the INVALSI tests?*
>
> *Giulia: I don't think so, I don't think I will.*
>
> *Chiara: How come?*
>
> *Giulia: Because I don't believe that the format can represent a huge difficulty. I mean, once a student is used to elaborating a sentence that's four, five or six lines long, that's a much more difficult operation conceptually than just recognising a sentence. So I think the format is not something that should cause them any problems. (GI3)*

Despite Giulia's view here, it transpired from the student interviews that they did in fact identify the task type as a substantial difficulty.

6.7 Beliefs about learners

This section discusses the ways in which Giulia interpreted her learners' listening practices, their listening difficulties and their level of understanding in listening classes.

6.7.1 Beliefs about learners' listening practices

As mentioned, Giulia believed that most of her students were easily distracted, passive and uncritical in their learning. Their approach to listening was often unsatisfactory for her:

Giulia: their listening [at home] is often dispersive, unmethodical. Some of them do it in a more correct way.

Chiara: what do you mean by correct?

Giulia: it means "I listen, I try to understand and potentially I listen again. So I use the video to increase my knowledge, both linguistically and generally in terms of my background". That's what I mean by correct: a video as a tool for studying and growing personally.

Chiara: aside from the video for studying, do you think they watch videos for fun?

Giulia: most of them do. […] two or three of them have a very mature approach to studying, but many of them watch American sit-coms and so on.

Chiara: do you find any positive value in this?

Giulia: I'd rather they watched something else. They generally watch fun and comic stuff. They like pochade, caricatures [..] which I think don't have much value in terms of learning.

Chiara: how come?

Giulia: because they give a distorted version of reality.

Chiara: it's still true that when they watch TV series, they're still practising listening, right?

Giulia: yes, but the TV series are still often based on situations that are... ridiculous, pochade.

Chiara: I'm playing devil's advocate here [laughs].

Giulia: no worries, that's fine [laughs]. I find that the benefits of this are very limited. Both in linguistic terms and in terms of personal growth. I find it's not meaningful. (GI3)

In light of these attitudes, Giulia tried to guide them on how to listen systematically at home and in school. She even created a document for students and parents explaining how listening practice should be done at home. This issue had a connection with Giulia's conception of what teaching listening essentially meant: to give learners a method to listen systematically and to accomplish the purposes for listening she deemed important (e.g. vocabulary, critical thinking), rather than to develop listening processes *per se*. Indeed, when asked about the teachability of listening, she claimed the following:

Giulia: if listening doesn't have a framework for working, if it's not done with a structure, it's a waste of time. If you just click play and leave it… it's not useful. There has to be a precise system, which is what I try to offer them in class. I ask them questions because it's my way to focus their attention on various aspects. For example, the journalist thing – had I not asked them, none of

*them would've seen the name or job. They'd have just thought it
was a young woman speaking. So for sure, listening can be
taught. (GI3)*

6.7.2 Learners' difficulties

Giulia appeared to believe that the students' main difficulty in listening was
of a top-down nature. The difficulty she cited most frequently was
background knowledge: learners did not know much about the topics of the
videos, hence they struggled to understand. She also cited the following
difficulties as equally important: words (unknown words, words the students
mix up); normalisation; pronunciation ("non-standard" varieties especially);
top-down overcompensation (as mentioned in 6.3.1). As I discuss in section
6.10, her beliefs about the learners' difficulties did not correspond entirely to
the learners' stated difficulties.

In line with her principles, she did not see it as her place to support the
learners by discussing the context or brainstorming vocabulary in advance.
Giulia opposed the teacher's role as a "knower" that she thought was
common in the system and caused learned helplessness. Conversely, her
students had to be ready to face any type of English and become
autonomous in doing so.

Despite this refusal to simplify tasks, she still appeared to engage
continuously with her learners to monitor their understanding. She noticed
their facial expressions, whether they started making notes straightaway or
copied from their classmates' notes and whether they raised their hands to
try and answer her questions. She explained that based on these
phenomena, she decided whether to replay parts of the input or pause her
questions. She also helped her students with their normalisation difficulty by
sometimes playing the whole video twice to allow them to become used to it.

6.8 Summary

The main points arising from the analysis of the teacher data in this chapter
may be summarised as follows:

- Giulia's listening instruction was based on a process of collective
  reconstruction of the key points in authentic videos, with no pre-
  listening and a series of questions she asked her learners for a
  variety of purposes.

- A core belief of Giulia's was about the role of education in fostering
  critical thinking and expanding students' knowledge by challenging

them, as explained in her syllabus. This was visible in her listening instruction, in which these two purposes often trumped the development of listening as a skill.

- Indeed, listening was done mostly for purposes other than the development of listening processes. This reflected the multitude of issues targeted in both formal and ongoing assessment.

- The attempts made by other teacher participants to simplify listening tasks seemed virtually absent in Giulia's work: her teaching was based on non-graded videos on complex topics, on which the students made notes and were continuously assessed. She did not regard it as her role to activate their background knowledge or remove the difficulties that she identified as recurrent for the students;

- No contextual factors (e.g. syllabi, examinations) seemed to influence Giulia's practice substantially.

6.9 Learners' beliefs and practices

This section discusses the learners' beliefs about listening and their reported practices based on questionnaire and interview data. I begin by illustrating what learners reported doing, in class and at home. I then analyse the learners' enjoyment, perceived importance and difficulties in listening. Finally, the learners' beliefs about themselves (i.e. listening self-concept and attributions) and emotions in relation to listening are presented.

6.9.1 Learner profiles

Giulia's class was composed of 22 fourth-year students (13 females and nine males). Three of the students who had volunteered for follow-up interviews were selected: Caterina, Enrico and Irene. Caterina had high listening self-concept; Enrico had fairly high self-concept and a strategic approach to listening; conversely, Irene had low self-concept and struggled with listening.

6.9.2 Learners' reported practices

The learners rated the frequency of six given listening activities in the classroom:

Table 6.2: Learners' answers to the question "How often are the following activities done in class? Choose your answer (1= never; 5= very often)"

Classroom activity	Mean
Listening to teacher	4.91
Listening tests	4.68
Watching video	3.91
Textbook audio	1.82
Listening to songs	1.77
Watching films	1.41

These data confirm that teacher talk time was perceived as high by students and videos were used frequently, as observed in the classroom. Giulia's learners also perceived listening tests as being done very often, though in light of their beliefs about assessment, such a high figure may be due to their perception that they were constantly evaluated even when they were not taking formal tests. Finally, learners confirmed Giulia's claim that textbooks were virtually never used in listening instruction.

Learners also described their listening activities at home: the majority, over 77%, reported doing some form of listening activity at home often or very often in their spare time. The students then elaborated on what type of activities they carried out outside of school:

Table 6.3: Types of leisure listening activities done by learners

Leisure activity	Number of times mentioned
Videos (YouTube, social media, film trailers)	17
Songs	16
Films	13
TV series	10
TED talks/lectures	2
News	1

Although songs do not necessarily require in-depth comprehension for listeners to enjoy them, most of the other most popular activities (especially videos, films and TV series) are more likely to require higher levels of comprehension and effort. However, this difficulty did not seem to deter students, suggesting that comprehending spoken English may not be a major obstacle for these learners to enjoy these activities in their spare time.

6.9.3 Listening: enjoyment, importance, difficulty

Indeed, when asked in the survey how much they enjoyed listening in English on a scale from 1 to 5, no learner reported disliking it, just under

82% answered that they either mostly liked it or liked it a lot and only about 18% reported not liking it nor disliking it. With a mean rank of 4.18, listening was the most liked out of the four skills – while speaking ranked 4.09, reading and writing had mean values of 3.64 and 3.23 respectively.

The interview data offered further insights into this trend, revealing that hearing spoken English was fascinating for these learners:

> *Chiara: do you like listening to English?*

> *Irene: yes, a lot. I've always liked it, since I was a child. I don't know why exactly, but it's fascinating to hear people speak it. I've always liked it. (II1)*

Even learners who found listening difficult appeared to enjoy listening to spoken English and regarded oral skills as crucial in allowing for contact with imagined interlocutors from other contexts:

> *Chiara: in questions 3 and 4, you say listening is a little difficult but you like it a lot.*

> *Enrico: yes, because I believe... I like it a lot because the important things are listening and speaking, interacting with a person from another culture and another social context. It's hard because listening to someone is not like listening to an audio, though. (EI1)*

Giulia's learners regarded developing all four skills as important; however, they saw oral skills as especially important for communication. Questionnaire results revealed that on a 5-point Likert scale, listening and speaking had a mean rank of 4.95, while reading and writing had a 4.23 mean. In a follow-up open-ended question, the learners elaborated on the reasons why they deemed it important to learn to listen. A distinction emerged between developing listening for imagined real-life communication needs, which accounted for the highest number of responses (twenty), and developing listening as a way to develop other skills or systems of the language (seven). It is interesting to highlight how Giulia's learners overall seemed to grasp the importance of developing listening as a skill in its own right, rather than simply as a tool for something else. In their interviews, they further stressed this practical need, citing both anecdotes and future imagined situations in which comprehending a speaker had been or would be necessary:

> *Chiara: in question 5, you say listening is very important for the opportunities you can get abroad and listening means understanding what a person is saying and being able to create a conversation. Can you tell me more?*

Irene: When I was at the doctors two weeks ago in [hometown], a North American person in the waiting room started speaking to me and asking me about things... we spoke for 45 minutes and she asked me what I did, if I like travelling, English, and I really liked it so I started a conversation with her.

Chiara: so you feel it's important. What about the "opportunities you can get abroad"?

Irene: I'd like to go abroad… maybe go to university there… so I think that abroad… well, if you can't understand English, then you struggle. (II1)

In analysing learners' views, it is interesting to notice how the generally positive attitude towards listening in English co-existed with the learners' stated difficulties. In the last part of the questionnaire, learners had a chance to expand on this: they were asked to express their degree of agreement, on a scale from one to five, with ten statements that described listening difficulties. Their responses revealed that their main difficulty was of a lexical nature ("unknown words"), followed by unknown topics and difficult accents. Table 6.4 illustrates this in more details:

Table 6.4: Learners' (n=22) listening difficulties based on questionnaire responses

Difficulty	Strongly agree/agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly disagree/agree
Unfamiliar words make it difficult for me to understand	13	6	3
I have difficulty understanding unfamiliar topics	13	4	5
I find it difficult to understand speakers with an unknown accent	12	3	7
I find it difficult to understand spoken text when I'm not interested in its content	11	4	7
I find it difficult to listen and write answers at the same time	10	4	8
Multiple choice questions are easier to answer than essay questions	8	9	5
Difficult grammatical structures make it hard for me to understand	6	7	9
Listening and reading questions at the same time is difficult for me	5	7	10
I find it difficult to read comprehension questions in full if there is little time between questions	4	10	8
I find it difficult to understand the meaning of a long spoken text	3	10	9

These data suggest that Giulia's students may indeed have been challenged by the lexical and thematic complexity and the pronunciation of the authentic videos that they watched in class. It is also apparent that the videos' content, which may not always have been of interest to the students, caused them comprehension problems, arguably linked to a lack of concentration, as they explained in interviews.

These results were generally confirmed in the interviews, although other difficulties, which featured less prominently in the quantitative data, appeared to be more central during my discussions with the three interviewees. Overall, Caterina, Enrico and Irene concurred that they found it easier to listen to English at home, where they could pause, replay, look up words and use subtitles (the latter being a practice that Giulia discouraged). At home, they were less anxious and the topics were more interesting, so they could concentrate more easily.

The main difficulty they cited was lexical, confirming the questionnaire data: in class, they struggled to cope with unknown words, recognise known words and identify word boundaries in the stream of speech. The second most cited difficulty was having to write and listen simultaneously, not having much time to think and having the added burden of reformulation, something that did not seem as prominent in the questionnaire results. Learners generally felt reformulation was especially important because it was connected to their assessment, in which mere listening comprehension was "not enough":

> *Enrico: with the written tests, it's always a matter of... I mean, I understand, I don't struggle per se, but I sometimes struggle to concentrate, because she asks these questions and you have such little time to answer a question correctly. And I sometimes struggle to focus on the most important things. Compared to other kinds of tests, the listening tests are the ones I perform less well in. Because fair enough, I listen and I get it, but there's also something more. Being able to listen is not enough.*
>
> *Chiara: you have to answer that specific question…*
>
> *Enrico: yes, and the most important thing is that she doesn't want us to repeat the words in the listening. We need to "interpret them" and be able to say them differently. This is a skill I sometimes can't really master. One thing is listening and repeating what the audio said, and another thing is writing it in another way.*
>
> *Chiara: so you struggle to rephrase.*
>
> *Enrico: yes, exactly. (EI2)*

This quote, and similar quotes from the other two learners, suggest that the task format might indeed have been more of a challenge than Giulia claimed, as discussed in section 6.10.

Other difficulties cited by the learners in interviews were accents, features of connected speech (native speakers "garbling their words"), understanding details in a video, only being allowed to watch once and not knowing enough about the topic. The learners elaborated in particular on their difficulties with "accents". From the interviews, there seemed to be a consensus that British English – "*inglese DOC"* (EI1) – was clearer and easier to understand, while American English speakers "contracted" and "garbled" their words more (which suggests a certain awareness, however implicit, of features of connected speech). British and American English were generally described as "standard"; other English varieties were perceived as non-standard and not proper English, hence more difficult to understand. Speakers of Outer Circle varieties, such as the Nigerian English woman from the video in Observation 4, were assumed to be non-native speakers: even learners like Enrico and Caterina, who, as I discuss in the next section, generally had adaptive attributions (effort, strategies), conceived of any "non-standard" English as something automatically harder to understand.

6.9.4 Listening self-concept, attributions and strategies

As is clear from Figure 6.1, Giulia's learners were slightly less confident in their listening than the overall population of this study, with half the students claiming to be only "average" and only one third either "good" or "very good". When asked whether they could or could not do most of the listening activities during lessons, 41% in this class (i.e. nine out of 22 learners) claimed they could not, indicating low listening self-concept as far as classroom activities were concerned. The overall average in this study was only 27%, potentially a sign of the higher challenge posed to these students by Giulia's listening tasks.
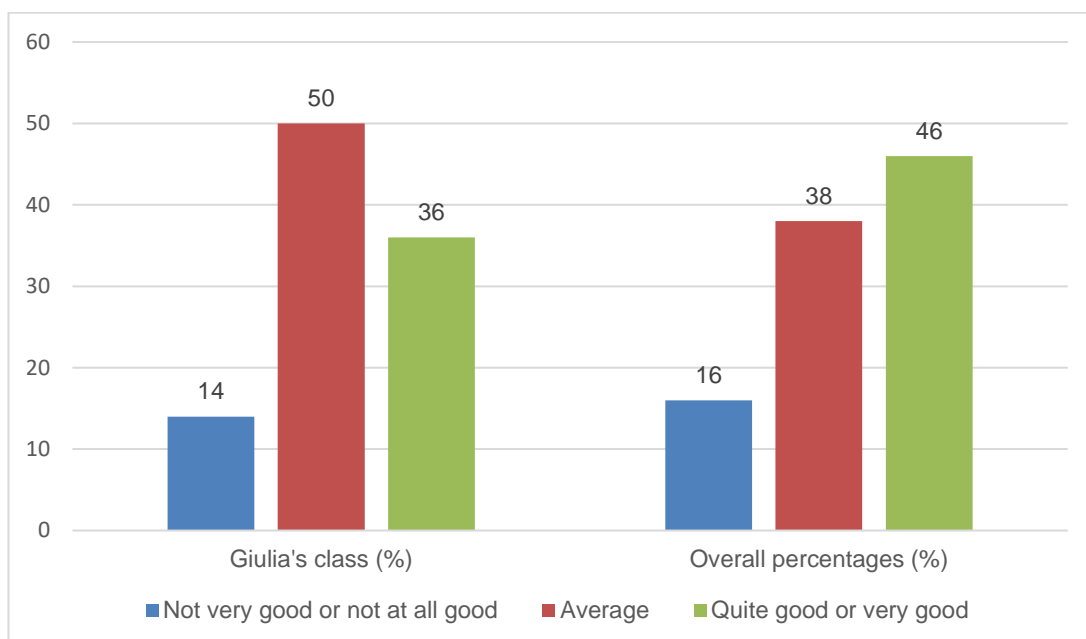
Figure 6.1: Learners' responses to the question "How good do you feel that you are at listening in school? Choose an option from 1 (not very good) to 5 (very good)"

In the following questionnaire item, the learners were asked to elaborate on the reasons why they could or could not complete listening tasks, that is, their attributions for their successes or failures. The higher self-concept students mentioned mainly reasons related to their effort: effort-related reasons appeared in 16 of their responses. This category included practising at home, doing extracurricular English classes, using deduction and focusing on the general meaning (reflecting a focus on top-down processes). There were also two mentions of ability-related reasons, along the lines of "I have more aptitude for English than others". On the other hand, among the students who believed that they could not complete most classroom listening tasks successfully, eight mentioned issues ascribable to a perceived lack of ability. Three learners also mentioned external reasons linked to the difficulty of the task, such as the speed of delivery or pronunciation in the listening texts.

The interviews offered further insights into the learners' attributions. Enrico and Caterina, the two learners with higher self-concept, attributed their successes and failures in listening to their own efforts and use of appropriate listening strategies. In her first interview, Caterina initially rated effort and ability as equally important, but when she elaborated on this, she acknowledged that her ability would be useless without her constant efforts. Conversely, Irene rated task difficulty (including task type and input factors such as pronunciation and

speed) and luck as being the main causes for her lack of success in most listening activities, stressing this concept repeatedly in her interviews:

> *Chiara: In the last interview, you said you sometimes struggle because they garble their words.*
>
> *Irene: yes. This time too... well, maybe she didn't garble her words, but since she didn't speak perfect English...*
>
> *Chiara: in what sense was it imperfect English?*
>
> *Irene: well the lexis wasn't simple, she was good, but I couldn't understand the pronunciation. (II2)*

These learners' attributional beliefs also give insights into the use of strategies. Enrico was a prime example of a strategic listener:

> *Chiara: in question 9, you write: "you need to use your brain when you listen and be able to deduce the meaning with intelligence if you don't understand it from the listening".*
>
> *Enrico: it goes back to what I was saying, in the sense that we... or at least I, since it's impossible for me to understand everything, I try to deduce what I don't understand by looking at the pictures, because the pictures are fundamental to understand what they are talking about. I also try to deduce the things I don't understand, first of all through my reasoning and secondly by applying this to the context and the pictures I'm seeing. So I try to fill the gap given by the fact that I don't understand everything by doing this […] when I do the tests, I put a sheet of paper in front of me. I write the most important things so that I remember them and so that in the second listen I can then focus on the things I didn't understand and not the ones I did understand, because I already have notes about the things I did understand. So I make notes and try to focus and free up as much space in my brain as possible. (EI1)*

This quote exemplifies the approach of a learner who was realistic about his expectations. Knowing that it would be impossible to understand everything was not a reason to give up, but the stepping stone for Enrico to implement strategies: looking at pictures, applying deduction, reviewing his deductions in light of the context and pictures in the video, making notes about key points, focusing selectively in the second listen on the parts not understood previously, emptying his mind and concentrating. In their interviews, Enrico and Caterina cited nine types of listening strategies they employed, while Irene only mentioned three. Most of the strategies mentioned were of a top-down nature (listening for gist, focusing and making notes on key points, inferring and deducing). Enrico and Caterina also talked about the affective processes they implemented to manage themselves during listening activities, such as remaining calm and coping with only partial understanding or messy notes.

Caution must be used in claiming a causal relationship between self-concept, attributions and use of listening strategies based on these data. Nonetheless, it is interesting to notice how Enrico and Caterina, who had higher self-concept and adaptive attributions, were better able to articulate their listening strategies, possibly indicating higher metacognitive awareness. It is also worth noting that no explicit strategy training was observed, nor did Giulia report including this in her listening lessons.

6.9.5 Learners' emotions

Considerations about how learners perceived themselves, their ability, their successes and failures in listening and the ways in which they reportedly managed listening tasks cannot be separated from the emotional side of their experiences in the classroom, as this emerged as an important theme in the qualitative data. Caterina, Enrico and Irene all experienced some form of listening anxiety in class. This was more of a core issue for Irene, as Caterina and Enrico seemed better able to manage their anxiety. Whenever Caterina referred to a negative emotion, she would generally follow it up by explaining how she managed it or by clarifying that to her, it was indeed manageable, as she did in this interview in relation to Observation 2:

> *Chiara: how did you feel during the listening?*

> *Caterina: Definitely a bit anxious because you have to pay attention and try not to miss absolutely anything. It's a manageable level of anxiety, though, I wasn't pulling my hair out or anything. (CI2)*

Despite apparently not having been explicitly trained in managing their emotional states, Caterina and Enrico had developed this idea of managing themselves as a way to cope with the difficulty of the listening tasks and, especially, with knowing that they were being constantly assessed:

> *Chiara: how did you feel during the class?*

> *Enrico: I'd say fairly calm... otherwise you cannot survive, because she assesses you in all the classes, three times a week. If you don't experience her classes this way, you can't survive. I am more tense during the tests, though. (EI2)*

As discussed, the learners perceived formal assessment (listening tests) as threatening or difficult to varying degrees, with the format of the test and ensuing anxiety affecting their performance. This appeared to be also true, though perhaps to a lesser extent, in everyday classroom activities. At the start of Observation 4, Giulia told the students explicitly that they would be assessed during the class (having refrained from doing so in the previous observations on

account of my presence in the classroom). However, in her interview, Irene explained the constant feeling of being assessed, which led her to doubt her teacher's words:

> *Chiara: how did you feel today?*
>
> *Irene: well, she said we were being assessed this time, so I was a bit more nervous. But even if she says we're not being assessed, she sees how we answer, so it's always as if we're assessed. So I'm always a bit anxious.*
>
> *Chiara: are you anxious because it's a listening or because you're being assessed?*
>
> *Irene: both actually. Listening and understanding and maybe speaking is the most difficult thing for me. (II2)*

Anxiety seemed to affect Irene even more in formal listening tests:

> *Chiara: when you do listening tests, the teacher shows you a video, she dictates some questions and you have 30-60 seconds to answer.*
>
> *Irene: yes, yes and for me it's super difficult, I get so nervous. Her listening tests for me are impossible. Because you have to listen and make notes, then she dictates the question and you have such little time to think, and you have to move onto the next question. So at the end you have one minute to review it, but it's just... then you have to submit. I'm so anxious that I write nonsense. (II2)*

On a more positive note, Caterina and Enrico appeared to use their pride as a stimulus to find ways to overcome difficulties, implementing the right strategies at the right time:

> *Chiara: during a listening task, do you ever tell the teacher you haven't understood?*
>
> *Enrico: no, because I always try to find a way to at least try. Saying "look, I don't understand"… nah, I'm quite a proud person so that would annoy me. Even if there is something I don't fully understand, I try to... from the little that you know, you try to expand by using your intuition. I often do that.*
>
> *Chiara: so you don't give up.*
>
> *Enrico: no, I don't. If the outcome is bad, then whatever, at least you tried. (EI2)*

6.9.6 Summary

This section has illustrated how Giulia's learners approached listening and the beliefs they held. In terms of how they experienced listening, listening to the teacher, taking listening tests and watching videos were reported to be frequent activities in their classes. The learners said they listened to English often at

home, using materials such as films and TV series, which require some form of engagement with and comprehension of the input. They appeared to enjoy listening to English and acknowledged its importance for successful communication, rather than just as a tool to learn the language. This enjoyment, however, coexisted with a number of reported listening difficulties: students provided insights into their difficulties concerning lexis, topic, "accents" (especially those described as "non-standard") and task demands. That listening may have been more challenging for this group than average was also evident from their lower than average self-concept. The two learners interviewed who claimed to have higher self-concept also tended to attribute their successes and failures to internal, controllable factors and reported managing their anxiety and processing difficulties more effectively by using cognitive and affective listening strategies.

6.10 Giulia and her learners: comparisons

This section presents the main instances in which Giulia's beliefs and practices and her learners' beliefs and reported practices overlapped and diverged. It discusses some clear instances of convergence and divergences in beliefs, as well as more complex situations including both relationships.

6.10.1   Convergence

Aided by a lack of contextual constraints, Giulia's teaching appeared overall coherent and consistent with her beliefs. Some of her strongest beliefs seemed to have been internalised by her learners. This was evident, for example, regarding her beliefs about standard English and textbooks. Indeed, the three learners interviewed seemed to have clear ideas of what was "good" standard English (British and American "without too much inflexion") and what was not (Outer and Expanding Circle varieties, slang). These beliefs may have been promoted by Giulia herself, for instance when she characterised Nigerian as "broken" English in class and she focused on "standard" pronunciation (e.g. dismissing slang and non-native speaker speech as "full of errors"). Interestingly, Caterina, Enrico and Irene were also adamant that a language textbook was unnecessary and detrimental. Even Irene, who was less confident in her English, agreed:

> Irene: at first, I thought having a textbook would be useful. Now I
> couldn't think of a class different from this. Those typical tests in
> which you have to conjugate a verb... at the end of the day, anyone
> can do that, while with this teacher, you have to be able to make a

sentence with the correct verb, prepositions… so it's much more difficult but, I think, much more useful. (II2)

6.10.2   Divergence

The focus on grammar and vocabulary in Giulia's post-listening work may have led some learners to interpret the purposes of the task differently from how they were intended. While the teacher saw listening primarily as a way to discuss a topic and develop critical thinking and only secondarily as a way to discuss language, Caterina repeatedly claimed not only that listening was a way for Giulia to teach grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary, but also that the topic was not too important:

> *Chiara: And why did you think the teacher chose this video?*

> *Caterina: It was purely for the sake of it, not for the topic. She doesn't really care about the topic. Then again, she might re-use the topic in subsequent classes, but I think she did it mostly for the pronunciation, to get us used to listening to different pronunciations […] On Holocaust Remembrance Day, we talked about it and we did a lesson on it but it's not so much because of its meaning, it's more for the linguistic structures, like if-clauses. (CI2)*

6.10.3   Convergence and divergence

Listening difficulties were one of the themes that made it difficult to identify a clear-cut convergence or divergence between Giulia and her learners. Although Giulia seemed to correctly identify some of the main difficulties faced by her class, namely words, topic and pronunciation, she believed that the task format had no real bearing on listening comprehension and performance in listening tests, refusing to prepare students for standardised tests. Conversely, learners seemed to have an issue with listening tasks (e.g. reformulating, simultaneously writing and listening) that Giulia may have overlooked. Similarly, learners also seemed to struggle with how English is produced in connected speech, something I was also able to identify in a few instances of the classes I observed. Giulia, on the other hand, seemed to underestimate or not be fully aware of the difficulties posed by connected features in authentic spontaneous speech.

Further, despite being aware of some of the most pressing issues for her learners, Giulia did not make any substantial effort to simplify tasks for them: for instance, she selected videos about complex political and current events despite knowing that learners were unfamiliar with such topics and that a lack of background knowledge hindered their comprehension. While she may have

wanted to challenge her learners, this apparently caused them to lose their concentration: as they explained in interviews, the videos were all teacher-sourced and sometimes learners simply found it harder to concentrate on topics about which they knew nothing or in which they were not interested.

Giulia's refusal to simplify listening tasks may also be connected to the peripheral role that considerations of learners' emotions had in her belief system. In fact, this did not emerge as a key theme in her interviews, nor did she seem to shelter learners from difficulty (and ensuing anxiety). Conversely, references to listening and test anxiety were frequent in learners' qualitative data. This certainly appeared to be an issue for them; however, they also seemed to have "normalised" difficulty as a part of listening and learning. Further, Enrico and Caterina had developed a wealth of listening strategies to cope with listening, including affective strategies to manage their emotional states. Although no claim can be made that Giulia's practices directly led these learners to develop such strategies, they certainly seemed to have learned to cope with anxiety through necessity, suggesting that learning to cope with a tolerable degree of difficulty and anxiety may be advisable in some contexts.

6.11 Chapter summary

Giulia presented a very particular approach to listening, working exclusively with authentic videos on complex socio-economic, political and historical topics and asking students questions for multiple purposes. Giulia regarded herself and her work as different from what she deemed common in the school system, of which she was critical. Her belief in the role of education in fostering critical thinking and challenging learners to expand their knowledge was core and influential in her work, while contextual factors seemed to have little impact on her. While acknowledging the challenges posed by such an approach to listening and showing the lowest levels of self-concept among the four classes surveyed in this study, Giulia's learners reported practising listening widely outside of the classroom and recognised the importance of learning to listen for future communication. Giulia also appeared to have exerted an influence on her learners, who appeared to have internalised some of her own beliefs, although this influence was limited.

In the next chapter, I turn to Teresa, a teacher who shared some key characteristics with Maria and Giulia and who was the only teacher in this research to report working with the Flipped Classroom methodology.

Chapter 7 Teresa

This chapter explores Teresa's beliefs and practices, and her students' beliefs and practices. The interactions between Teresa's and her learners' beliefs are also discussed.

7.1 Context

Like Maria, Teresa participated in this study with one of her third year *liceo scientifico* classes. This group was part of a special experimentation section of the school working with Flipped Classroom (FC) methodology. In the Flipped Classroom, students are asked to interact with content at home and go to school prepared to participate in discussions and group activities (Gruba et al., 2016). This applied to all school subjects for this class. Based on observations and Teresa's accounts, the most frequent activities in English were watching videos and listening to podcasts at home, and working in groups and pairs in class. This approach had a strong influence on Teresa's beliefs, especially regarding the value of learner autonomy, one of the tenets of the FC that she seemed to have internalised. The FC was also visible in the syllabus: indeed, the teachers of this class retained an older, longer form for the class syllabus to make space for explanations of the teaching and learning approach. The English syllabus designed by Teresa also included a substantial list of functions and functional exponents, and it mentioned listening strategies. Finally, in terms of materials, unlike most other classes in the school, this class used Pearson's *Speakout Upper-Intermediate* (Eales and Oakes, 2011). Despite being deemed more challenging (especially due to its authentic BBC-sourced audios), *Speakout* was considered more communicative and suitable for this class. Other frequently used materials were FCE sample tests and authentic Youtube and TED videos.

7.2 Teacher profile

Teresa had over thirty years of experience as an English teacher, a career she had wanted to pursue since middle school. She gained a Master's Degree in Modern Foreign Languages (English, German and French) and spent a year in the UK doing research for her dissertation. She reported not receiving any pedagogical pre-service training, though she participated in various seminars and Erasmus+ exchanges over the years. Teresa was also responsible for the career counselling service at her school, which may have made her more aware of her students' future needs and ambitions.

7.3 Listening instruction

In the four classes observed, Teresa adopted three different formats for her listening activities, illustrated in Table 7.1. In her interviews, she clarified that she conceived of these as three formats with different purposes. The first format, used in TO1 and TO3, was based on fairly long, authentic videos (eleven minutes in TO1 and six minutes in TO3). No specific task was set other than listening for general comprehension. After watching, a class discussion took place. In the second format, used in TO2, the students listened to shorter textbook audios and answered comprehension questions. Teresa checked their answers, offered encouragement and elicited their difficulties. In the third format (TO3 Activity 1 and TO4), the students did FCE sample tests.

This chapter illustrates how each listening format was used, how Teresa made sense of it and what purposes she associated with it. As is discussed below, some common features emerged among the three formats. First, all the activities were fairly demanding and some degree of difficulty and frustration was visible in the learners. Second, Teresa either did very brief pre-listening activities or omitted them entirely. Third, Teresa's work was strongly grounded in two main beliefs: the value of learner autonomy and the importance of promoting a calm state of mind for her learners.

Table 7.1: Teresa's listening classes

Observation	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7	Step 8	Step 9	Step 10	Step 11
TO1	Brief schemata activation about Brexit and the UK.	Learners watch video about Brexit for general comprehension. No set task.	Teresa asks questions about key points of the video.	Learners watch video again individually on their laptops. Teresa walks around monitoring.							
TO2	Brief schemata activation about flat sharing.	Learners listen to an audio about "speed flat mating" from *Speakout*, trying to answer two gist questions.	Teresa checks answers to questions. Learners cannot answer second question, so Teresa replays audio.	Learners listen and try to answer the second question.	Teresa asks for learners' feedback. Learners still have no answer. Teresa feeds it to them.	Teresa plays second part of audio. Learners match each speaker to their attitude.	Teresa checks answers. Noticing learners' frustration, Teresa reassures them and replays audio.	Learners work in groups and pairs comparing their answers. Teresa walks around monitoring.	Teresa replays audio with transcript.	Teresa elicits feedback on learners' difficulties.	Learners listen again individually .Some learners ask Teresa about words from the listening

TO3	Activity 1: Learners listen to a FCE Part 1 audio and complete task.	Learners compare their answers.	Teresa goes through the correct answers with students. No follow-up on incorrect answers.	Activity 2: Teresa introduces video on immigration. She reassures learners about not being able to understand all the words.	Learners watch video for general comprehension. No set task.	Teresa reassures learners about not understanding words and initiates discussion.	Group discussion on immigration and how it relates to Italy.	Teresa clarifies meaning and pronunciation of some words from the video.	Learners watch video again individually, some with subtitles. Teresa walks around monitoring and reassuring learners.		
TO4	Teresa tells learners to get ready for FCE practice.	Teresa plays audios for a whole FCE practice test twice. Learners complete FCE test.	Teresa checks answers as a group.	On one occasion, Teresa explains how she misunderstood part of the listening and models how she arrived at the right answer	Teresa asks how many mistakes students made. She offers encouragement and reassurance						

7.3.1 Format A: long authentic videos

In TO1, Teresa used a video about Brexit scenarios (Channel 4 News, 2018), while in TO3 she chose a TED talk featuring a Mexican girl telling her story of migrating to the USA (TEDx Talks, 2016). In TO1, Teresa did a brief pre-listening activity, activating the learners' schemata:

> *Teresa: this video is about one thing, you all know what it is. If I say Brexit, what do you think about?*
>
> *Learner 1: What?*
>
> *Teresa: Brexit.*
>
> *Learner 2: Britain leaving the EU.*
>
> *Teresa: yes, Britain leaving the EU. What's the UK? What do we refer to as the UK?*
>
> *Various learners: Northern Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales…*
>
> *Teresa: why do we talk about the UK especially when it comes to Brexit? Why don't we say Great Britain?*
>
> *[silence]*
>
> *Teresa: You haven't thought about it. Because politically the UK is the four nations and the referendum was in the four nations. So when we say, "London and Great Britain will leave the EU", we actually mean the UK, so Northern Ireland is leaving as well. Now let's listen to this video.*
>
> *[Teresa plays video] (TO1)*

Overall, Teresa either did very brief pre-listening activities focusing on content or she did no preparation activities (e.g. in TO3). Similar to Maria, she explained her pre-listening activities by underlining the value of activating the learners' background knowledge and connected this to an automatic process of thinking about relevant vocabulary:

> *Chiara: okay, so you do these introductions so they start thinking.*
>
> *Teresa: yes, thinking about the topic and expecting a certain type of words or phrases, because in different contexts, one unconsciously thinks about a certain semantic field or a certain type of words. (TI2)*

Despite acknowledging the importance of a brief introduction, Teresa was wary of doing long linguistic work before starting a listening, like Giulia:

> *Teresa: we have a warm-up and a "start thinking" phase and then the listening or the reading, and then the linguistic exploration. I find this is the best approach. Not because our textbooks are already structured this way, but because in my opinion, the linguistic exploration can be a reflection they can do afterwards. If they do it*

before the listening, it's a merely linguistic activity, it's something else. The basis is communication, not the knowledge or exploration or "talking in theory about" the language. That comes after, so it's a reflection: it means finding linguistic, lexical rules of usage, endings, prefixes, idioms, etc., but a posteriori. (TO2)

Aside from briefly setting up the task and activating schemata, Teresa took a few moments before playing videos to reassure her learners, a frequent feature in her work. In TO3, she told the learners they may not understand some words and she explained the function of this caveat in her interview:

Chiara: when you introduce this video, you say "okay, we'll hear it once together so that everybody knows... and we'll focus on some words which you'll probably not get. Feel free to look up words if you want in the meantime".

Teresa: I said it to make them feel calm because the initial shock of hearing a girl like this, speaking so fast with a thick accent… for some of them, like Silvia or Giorgia, Alessandro or Federico, it would create anxiety. So I said, "don't worry" […] I was anticipating this and trying to reassure them. So the message was: if you don't understand, don't feel inadequate. (TI3)

This highlights some recurrent core features of Teresa's work. First, anticipating that a listening might be challenging was not a deterrent for her and she still used it in her classes. Her approach to listening difficulty was of an *a posteriori* nature, i.e. she tried to engage with her learners to tackle their difficulties together after listening, rather than protect them from difficulty. This also highlights a second key feature: in order to have this space to explore and engage with her learners' difficulties, she needed to create a safe space, in which the learners could feel calm and at ease. As discussed in section 7.5, this was rooted in her belief that some learners had low listening self-concept.

While listening, the learners had no task set by the teacher aside from trying to understand the video and, if they wanted, make notes. To Teresa, this was clearly in line with the need to promote learner autonomy as advocated in the Flipped Classroom philosophy:

Chiara: I noticed you didn't use any specific tasks: they know they have to make notes and listen.

Teresa: well, when they were younger, it was more structured and guided. They would have the textbook […] but now they are more mature and they can understand and they can also understand that if they do the listening on their own with their headphones, it's because that's how it works in the <u>Flipped</u> [Classroom]. They have to do it this way, then they have to know how to make notes. They know they have to, because that's how the <u>Flipped</u> [Classroom] works. (TI2)

The importance of learner autonomy also emerged in the post-listening phase of Teresa's work in TO1 and TO3, where learners were given the opportunity to re-watch the videos individually, using their own laptops and mobiles (which they used during all the classes observed). Teresa saw this as a way to foster autonomous learning and provide them with a model to follow at home, when watching videos by themselves:

> *Teresa: I always give them time to re-watch individually or in pairs.*
>
> *Chiara: with or without subtitles.*
>
> *Teresa: yes, because they have to manage themselves.*
>
> *Chiara: so what is the purpose of this individual listen?*
>
> *Teresa: to make them feel responsible and convey to them that they can use materials that they can find online and use [the listening] at home in this way too. So they shouldn't be scared of watching a video in English, they [should] know there are subtitles, transcriptions… (TI3)*

Overall, the post-listening phase in this format took up the bulk of the listening class. It mainly consisted of three tasks: discussing key points, focusing on words from the text and, as mentioned above, re-watching the video individually. Right after watching the video, Teresa asked her students to reconstruct its key points. Being aware of the challenges posed by these authentic videos, she only focused on general understanding of key points and in doing so, she took the opportunity to explain that some degree of difficulty in comprehension was normal and could be overcome. She discussed this with reference to the TEDx video:

> *Chiara: after you showed the video, you said "okay, so I'm sure you won't have got some parts, but that doesn't matter, we'll have time to hear it again. Now I would like you to tell me your first impressions, what is the main message, the meaning, the key points of what she said". Can you comment on this?*
>
> *Teresa: because some of them may get lost in the phrases or words... and when they don't understand, they can get distracted, but I wanted them to be ready to move on beyond an obstacle and remain active in their listening. (TI3)*

Once again, knowing that a video could be challenging was not a reason for Teresa to avoid using it as listening material. Rather, she tried to impress upon her learners the importance of understanding the key points and persevering in the face of difficulty. To this end, she also offered some support by working on words from the text. In TO3, for instance, she focused on the American pronunciation of certain words, which, despite being within the vocabulary knowledge of the learners, they seemed to have failed to recognise. She

tackled this by pronouncing them in an American accent, thus raising the learners' awareness of a different pronunciation, and by writing them on the board as soon as she realised they were problematic:

> *Teresa: when I asked about the word, I noticed some perplexity so I wrote it on the board straightaway so I wouldn't cause them any embarrassment. (TI3)*

Overall, the pre-listening schemata activation, the while-listening focusing on general comprehension and the post-listening reconstruction of the key points revealed a focus on the content, rather than on the language, which was only covered when it had been an obstacle for comprehension. This was in line with Teresa's stated purposes for her Format A: to cover specific topics, especially when related to important current affairs or interdisciplinary projects the students were working on, or to make them reflect more deeply on a topic:

> *Chiara: So you chose this TED talk on immigration.*

> *Teresa: Yes, because of this interdisciplinary project about mediaeval travel and the presentation that they will soon do, so [migration] was one of the topics. The objective was to continue this reflection on immigration to then try and help them gain perspective on the present.*

> *Chiara: so reflecting... this video could be considered fairly political.*

> *Teresa: yes, it is, but I wanted it to have a strong impact. That's why I chose this video and another video for next week of an Asian lady who talks about her experience as a "boat person". The girl today spoke fast, but I think it had quite an impact because she's young and talks about an experience she lived when she was younger, and she's a girl just like them. It was on purpose, because I think they're just lucky to have been born here. It had this educational value. (TI3)*

It is clear that the anticipated difficulty of this video was again not a deterrent for Teresa: the purpose was to cover and discuss a topic that had high educational value. This approach to difficulty is further evidenced in her work in Format B, the topic of the next section.

7.3.2 Format B: textbook listening

In Observation 2, the whole lesson focused on a listening from the textbook on the concept of "speed flat-mating" (Appendix 12), a similar experience to speed dating but for finding housemates. The audio included British and American English speakers, and non-native speakers. The conversations sounded authentic, unscripted and background noise could be heard in the audio. The exercises included two comprehension questions for gist and a section on identifying the speakers' attitude. Overall, though the comprehension questions may not have been overly complicated, the input seemed to be challenging for

the learners. This shed a light on Teresa's way of handling difficulty and gave her an opportunity to use some techniques to make her learners feel calmer, one of her priorities.

After a brief schemata activation exercise in which Teresa elicited her learners' ideas of a perfect housemate, the learners started listening and trying to answer two gist comprehension questions. Teresa saw the value of having a set task in place in this format because she conceived of it as a separate activity from the more content-oriented Format A, which was aimed at discussing a specific topic, and the exam-oriented Format C. In her mind, a structured textbook activity was aimed at comprehension, but also at what she called "linguistic exploration", entailing a focus on vocabulary and pronunciation.

In this class, Teresa showed how she continuously engaged with and responded to her learners' comprehension: when she realised they could not answer a question, she decided to replay the audio and later provided them with the answer; noticing their frustration with the second audio, she offered reassurance, replayed the audio, then replayed it again while showing the transcript on the whiteboard and finally asked them for feedback on the listening.

> *Teresa: was the second and third listen a bit better?*
>
> *Learners: [murmuring]*
>
> *Teresa: yes, some parts were more obscure. Could you read and listen at the same time?*
>
> *Learners: yes.*
>
> *Teresa: and were there any phrases that you didn't know, for example?*
>
> *Learner 1: well like there were some sentences, sometimes they started, they said something, then they stopped and changed it.*
>
> *Teresa: exactly, so that might be confusing. And as for the language used, the idioms used, was it overall understandable? 50/50? or 70/30%?*
>
> *Learners: more than 50%.*
>
> *Teresa: OK, more. (TO2)*

While eliciting feedback, Teresa was also trying to achieve the linguistic aim that she believed was associated with this listening format, attempting to elicit difficult vocabulary. As she explained in her interviews, she never pre-determined what vocabulary to focus on, but she let it emerge based on the learners' difficulties. Nevertheless, this aim was not fulfilled on this occasion.

Based on this extract, it is also worth noting that despite having just experienced frustration and obstacles to their comprehension, the learners felt comfortable enough to share their difficulties with their teacher. Teresa was in fact aware of these difficulties from the outset:

> *Chiara: the audio about flatmating. You listened to it. First of all, how did you choose it? Was it difficult?*
>
> *Teresa: it was a bit difficult. Some of them are definitely at that level and aside from a few words, they understood. A big part of the class had a few difficulties, for sure.*
>
> *Chiara: did you expect this?*
>
> *Teresa: sure, of course.*
>
> *Chiara: and you chose it anyway.*
>
> *Teresa: absolutely, because you must always stimulate them. Then, afterwards, you can work on it […] That textbook has interviews from the BBC. And of course it's demanding, but I believe it's fair that way because they have to be immersed in what could potentially be a listening activity and maybe even a speaking activity, an interaction outside of school. (TI2)*

This excerpt further clarifies how Teresa avoided simplifying listening activities for her learners and also how her learners' future needs were at the forefront of many of her pedagogical decisions. As is discussed further in section 7.5, Teresa talked at length in her interviews about her learners' ambitions in pursuing scientific disciplines and stressed how one of her objectives was to ensure that English would not be an obstacle for them. Indeed, unlike the other teacher participants, she considered the type of school (a contextual factor examined in section 7.4) an important factor in her decisions. While these students may not have intrinsically enjoyed English, and English had a less important role as a subject in *liceo scientifico*, they still needed it to succeed in their future:

> *Teresa: it's not linguistic competence strictly speaking that they'll need: they'll need to use English for their fields of interest so there's quite a difference. (TI1)*

This concern with students' future needs was also the key to resolve a conflict regarding her beliefs about Cambridge exams, as discussed in the next section.

7.3.3 Format C: FCE preparation

In TO3 and TO4, Teresa used FCE preparation materials. In both cases, the lesson resembled exam conditions: there was no pre-listening, the learners could listen to the recordings twice and there was no follow-up work aside from checking answers.

Teresa was aware that these activities could be challenging; however, not only did she remain consistent with her overall approach to difficulty, whereby she did not try to simplify tasks, but she also emphasised that practising for Cambridge exams was crucial due to their unquestionable importance for her learners' future:

> *Teresa: they need to achieve a competence and have the right preparation to face a proficiency exam, which they will have to do at the end of their school... they don't "have to" do it, but it's society and the academic world that require it. So unless they want to deny themselves certain opportunities, they have to do it. (TI1)*

Despite having qualms about the validity of these exams, Teresa devoted classroom time to exam preparation, which was also connected to formal assessment in this class (as discussed in section 7.4).

After listening, Teresa went through the correct answers with her students. At one point, she modelled the process that she followed to arrive at a correct answer, explaining why her initial answer was incorrect and how she solved her mishearing by using grammatical knowledge to infer the right word for a specific gap. She explained the value of modelling these strategies for her learners:

> *Chiara: here you're checking the answers to Part 2, with the gap fill. The right answer was "badge"; you said, "I initially wrote this but then I changed it". Why do you explain this?*
>
> *Teresa: firstly because it might make them feel better [laughs] and also it could make them understand the strategies that could change their answer. I mean, it's true, in the listening there was only the word "badge", but previously the [speaker] had also said green, because usually in the listening it's the word they listen out for that they have to write. If they have to or can write one or more words, as was the case here, then you might imagine the two words are said one straight after the other. In this case, they weren't […] By looking at the sentence from a grammatical point of view, the plural would have been the correct option. (TI4)*

This extract warrants two considerations. First, there was value in modelling listening strategies for Teresa, who highlighted this value in various interviews and included them explicitly in her syllabus too. Nevertheless, this was the only instance in which she addressed strategies in class. Second, teaching these strategies appeared to serve the purpose of making the learners "feel better", in line with Teresa's belief about promoting a calm and reassuring classroom environment. Indeed, after checking her students' answers, she proceeded to ask them how many mistakes they had made and offered them praise and encouragement:

> *Chiara: here Silvia tells you she made eleven mistakes and you reassure her.*

Teresa: well, yes, because eleven mistakes are quite a lot, but I can't say "you're terrible at this". Especially because Silvia, like other students in this class, has some difficulties. You cannot discourage them; you always have to encourage them and make them feel better and ensure they know that improving is possible for them too. Otherwise they give up. (TI4)

As is discussed in section 7.5, Teresa saw it as her role to encourage learners and boost their self-concept. She mostly wanted to impress upon her learners that effort was the key to improvement. In other words, she was keen on attempting to change their attributions so that their self-concept, and consequently, the amount of effort made by them would increase.

7.4 Engagement with contextual factors

Teresa appeared to reckon mostly with three contextual factors in her work: assessment, the syllabus and the type of school in which she taught. One further contextual factor, the Flipped Classroom, was also of great importance. However, it is not discussed here because despite being initially an external factor for Teresa (in that it was not entirely her decision to join the experimentation), she appeared to have internalised some tenets of this methodology (especially learner autonomy) and discussed them as her own beliefs. Nevertheless, as discussed below, this methodology did impose certain constraints on her teaching, for instance in terms of assessment. It is also worth noting that Teresa interpreted the FC in her own personal way, sometimes diverging from commonly accepted understandings of this methodology: for instance, she devoted a relatively substantial portion of her classes to viewing videos and to exam preparation, when these would be prime examples of activities to be conducted at home in the FC.

In determining how to assess her learners' listening, Teresa had to reckon with the rules adopted collectively by the FC teachers, whereby tests only occurred three times a year for all subjects (whereas teachers would normally decide individually how often to test their students). Teresa claimed in TI1 that she was going to use First Certificate listening materials (despite having doubts about their validity) for her English tests with this class; however, in line with her continuous engagement with her learners' levels of understanding, she reported in her last interview that she had changed her mind and would not formally test their listening because she had noticed that several students still made too many mistakes.

While this appeared to be a decision slightly contrasting with her general approach to difficulty (whereby she opted for not "protecting" her learners from

difficulty), it may have been connected to her engagement with their emotional needs. This engagement was also visible in her commitment to a type of holistic, ongoing evaluation of learners that she and the other FC teachers carried out in everyday classes by observing her students' behaviour and answers, similarly to Giulia. For Teresa, however, this was not supposed to cause her students any anxiety:

> *Chiara: So in your mind this is an informal assessment moment.*
>
> *Teresa: Absolutely.*
>
> *Chiara: Do you think the students realise?*
>
> *Teresa: I think they do [..] they know in theory but sometimes when they're in the classroom they don't really realise. So I don't think they feel this tension constantly. They can be calm during the activities that we do even if they know what the Flipped Classroom entails in theory. (TI3)*
>
> *Chiara: so you don't test listening per se.*
>
> *Teresa: no, because they will do the certificate. We'll prepare for it, but finding an ad hoc space to assess it would be counterproductive and it would create anxiety for many of them, and I don't want them being in the classroom with this anxiety. (TI2)*

As is clear from this extract, Teresa believed that her learners would at some point sit a Cambridge exam, although, as discussed in section 7.3.3, they were not technically forced to do it. Teresa taught the test, incorporated it into her formal school assessment and acknowledged its value for the learners' future careers. Nevertheless, she questioned the validity of the exam and its impact on her teaching:

> *Teresa: if these exams didn't exist, I wouldn't do the mock tests, practising managing that particular type of task. I would of course do more of other things, so in terms of listening, I'd do more videos or news, because we have the world [i.e. materials] at our disposal in the classroom. This is the nicest and most useful thing.*
>
> *Chiara: more useful than certificates?*
>
> *Teresa: well... more useful in terms of their real language learning, because being good at managing a task like a certificate definitely means you know English and are able to manage not just your comprehension but also your production, but it's not necessarily that someone who gets a C1 or C2 is actually better than others. It depends on many factors. On that particular morning of the exam, one might feel sick, you know, there's many factors. (TI4)*

It is thus clear how concerns about the test's validity in assessing real listening ability (rather than just the ability to manage specific exam tasks) and about the

impact on teaching practices were shared among teacher participants; however, Teresa still incorporated exam preparation in her teaching due to higher order beliefs about the learners' future needs.

These future needs were also important to how Teresa's work was influenced by the type of *liceo* she worked in. She was aware that English was not a core subject for her students and believed that they did not intrinsically enjoy learning it, but conceived of it more instrumentally, as a tool to succeed in their chosen fields. This awareness led her to adapt her teaching in various ways, such as assessing them in comparatively less demanding forms or covering less literature:

> *Teresa: I struggle a lot more with the scientifico classes: because they chose this type of school, they are not internally or emotionally interested in the language and literature. That's why I try to make it more modern […] then have the students read and listen and leave it up to them to find out more about topics that are more based on their passions. (TI3)*

The final contextual factor influencing Teresa was the syllabus. Although she could design it and implement it as she wanted, based on loose guidelines, she still perceived it as her obligation to follow it. This revealed an apparent contrast in her beliefs, whereby she initially referred to grammar as something she "had to do" because of the syllabus, but when later queried about it, she clarified that while she felt this obligation to do it, she also believed in its value as a cornerstone to language learning. The syllabus, reflecting a structural view of language learning, was thus internalised as a requirement despite not being an externally enforced constraint.

7.5 Beliefs about learners

Teresa's beliefs about her learners emerged clearly with regards to the interrelated issues of listening self-concept, attributions for failures and difficulties. Although she rated her learners as overall proficient listeners, with some exceptions, Teresa claimed that several of them had low self-concept. When explaining why in TO2 she had told her learners they might not understand some words before listening, she reported doing this to tackle this low self-concept:

> *Chiara: do you think they feel inadequate with listening?*
>
> *Teresa: some of them do. Some of them struggle, they don't feel able to handle the task, not at the level of the stronger students. The issue is that some of them feel inadequate and that they have to do harder tasks because there are the stronger students in the class who raise*

the level of the class […] so they think, had it been a "standard"
class, [the tasks] would not have been so difficult. (TI3)

In Teresa's view, therefore, some of her learners had maladaptive attributions in that they believed that the task difficulty was a major cause for their failures in listening. This was in turn due to their perception of peers as more able: peer experiences seemed to have been one of the main criteria for them to gauge their performance, influencing their attributional beliefs and ultimately their self-concept. As discussed in section 7.9.2 below, Teresa's beliefs were only partially mirrored in her learners' actual reported difficulties. It is also worth noting how Teresa's belief about her learners' self-concept was one of the main factors leading her to adopt a reassuring approach, trying to foster feelings of calmness as a pre-requisite to the enhancement of self-concept levels. Indeed, when she discussed why she showed the learners the transcript after listening, she explained this:

Chiara: why did you show them the transcript at the end?

Teresa: because I want them to feel calm in my classes. They must not worry about not understanding and not being able to answer or speak […] they must feel calm and free to speak and participate.

Chiara: so this feeling of calmness is crucial for you.

Teresa: it is. It trumps other things because some of [my students] aren't great; there's a group that's very good, but others are less good and they feel less good. It's true, they are, but they need to not think that of themselves, because if they do, there's this block in their mind. They think "I'll never be able to do it", but I'm trying to work so that even these people who maybe feel a bit less capable compared to others will still have the chance to speak their mind. I've taught for many years and many students have told me "Prof, I'm scared of the anxiety"… there's this anxiety especially in their third year. (TI2)

In this extract, Teresa explained how anxiety was a difficulty of which she was aware. As mentioned in the previous sections, she tried to tackle this by creating a supportive environment and engaging continuously with the learners' comprehension. Teresa was also aware of other listening difficulties faced by the learners. The factor she believed to be the main obstacle for her learners was lexical: unknown words or words not recognised. The second most important obstacle in Teresa's view consisted of pronunciation and English varieties. Nevertheless, in line with her approach to difficulty, she did not "protect" her learners: rather, she exposed them to both native and non-native varieties in preparation for real-life demands:

Chiara: in the flatmating listening, I heard British, American and non-native accents. What do you think about this?

Teresa: it's great, it's life… I might lean a little more toward British myself, but it's great. […] I use different accents because it's fair that they should understand even a non-native speaker, a German or Chinese speaking English. Asian accents are harder [laughs] so I try not to use them, but I've used some Indian because their pronunciation was… understandable. But it's part of reality so I think it's fair to use them. (TI2)

As mentioned in section 7.3.1, Teresa's way of dealing with these difficulties was to encourage her learners to reconstruct listening texts based on the key points and stress the importance of persevering when missing words or phrases in the audio.

Finally, the other difficulties mentioned by Teresa in order of how pressing she believed them to be were speed, task (especially FCE Parts 2 and 3) and lack of background knowledge. She also cited concentration and behavioural issues: because her learners had become so accustomed to working in groups due to the flipped classroom methodology, Teresa argued that sitting silently and concentrating on listening had now become an extra challenge for them.

7.6 Summary

Overall, Teresa's work can be summarised as follows:

- Teresa used a mixture of FCE, textbook and authentic materials, ranging from highly structured to loosely structured activities.
- She employed three formats for different purposes and one of her core beliefs was that the content of listening texts was more important than the language as a purpose for classroom listening.
- Teresa believed that several of her learners had low listening self-concept originating in maladaptive attributions (task difficulty due to peers being more able). Consequently, she tried to create a reassuring environment for them, fostering feelings of calmness that she identified as pre-requisites for listening success.
- Despite this concern with emotional states, Teresa still used challenging content and tasks, opting for not simplifying listening activities.
- Teresa's approach to dealing with learners' difficulties and frustration at challenging listening was *a posteriori*: she engaged with her learners' difficulties, reassured them and occasionally modelled strategies.
- Some contextual factors were referred to by Teresa when explaining her teaching, including exams (on which she held contrasting beliefs but ultimately believed were necessary for her learners' future), the type of *liceo*, the syllabus and the Flipped Classroom methodology (which she

interpreted in her own way and of which the tenet of learner autonomy seemed to have impacted her thinking the most).

7.7 Learners' beliefs and practices

This section illustrates the learners' beliefs and practices concerning listening based on the analysis of questionnaire, observation and interview data.

7.7.1 Learners' profiles

Teresa's class included nineteen third-year *liceo scientifico* learners, with ten females and nine males. Three learners were selected for interviews: Silvia, a learner with high listening self-concept; Federico, a learner with average self-concept, and Bruno, a learner with low self-concept. As will become clear from the discussion below, their attributional styles appeared more complex and their distinction less clear-cut than in other cases.

7.7.2 Listening: enjoyment and importance

Learners in this class appeared to enjoy listening in English, with the majority (16 out of 19) reporting liking listening a lot or quite a lot, a finding that was corroborated in interviews. Eighteen learners also perceived learning to listen as important or very important; the reasons they gave for the perceived importance are summarised in Figure 7.1 (ranked by the number of times each reason was mentioned).
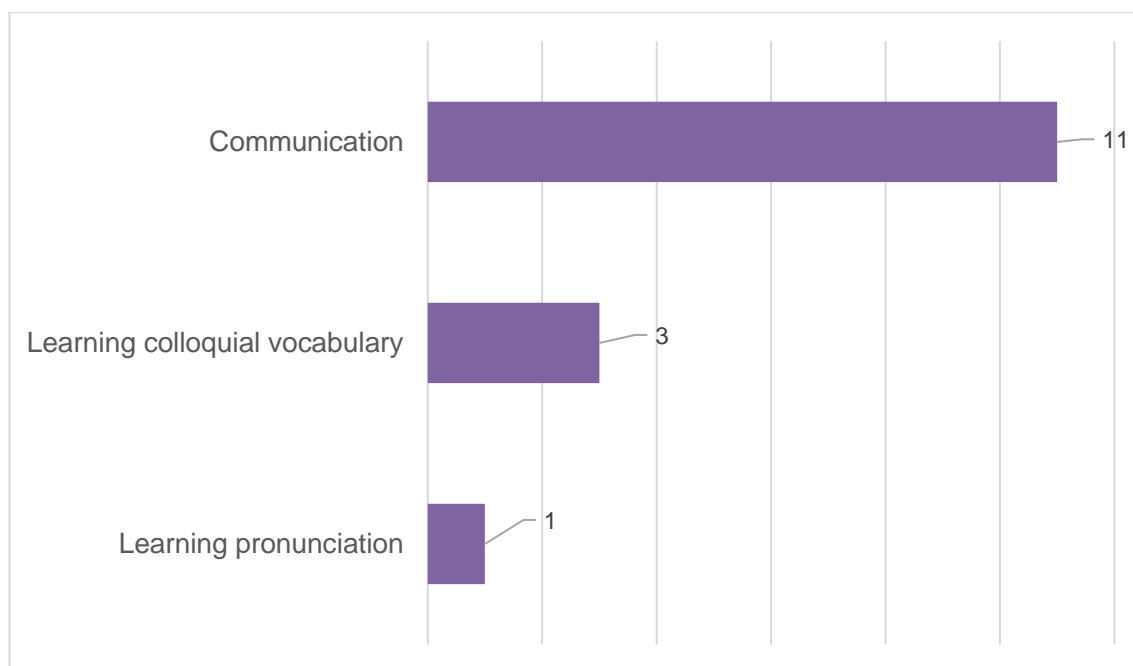
Figure 7.1: Reasons for perceived importance of listening

Real-life communication needs appeared to be at the forefront of the learners' concerns: learning to listen was regarded far more as a path to function effectively in communication than a vehicle for learning language (e.g. learning grammar through listening). This may have various explanations. One of these, reported by student interviewees, was language immersion experiences. As Federico explained, failing in an everyday situation such as ordering coffee in English raised his awareness of the importance of understanding details in spoken language and not just relying on context:

> *Federico: especially in everyday conversations with people, maybe on the street, understanding the context isn't always enough. There are little shades of meaning and if you don't understand them, the context changes completely. Maybe you don't realise, but they may be asking a completely different thing.*
>
> *Chiara: has that happened to you?*
>
> *Federico: yes, in Dublin… once we went to Starbucks and I didn't realise they asked me if I wanted milk in my coffee, so I said "yeah yeah" [laughs] and it was a disaster.*
>
> *Chiara: so you struggled to understand a word or…*
>
> *Federico: yes, a word, because I understood she was asking me something but didn't understand the word.*
>
> *Chiara: and why do you think that was? I mean, you know the word "milk".*
>
> *Federico: I do, but the pronunciation is very different so she said it differently [laughs] so… it's also a little bit of anxiety… the first time you go to Starbucks, it feels weird. (FI1)*

7.7.3 Learners' reported practices

The learners' perceptions of the classroom activities seemed to reflect the heterogeneity of task types observed in classes, as shown in Table 7.2:

Table 7.2: Learners' answers to the question "How often are the following activities done in class? Choose your answer (1= never; 5= very often)"

Classroom activity	Mean
Listening to teacher	5.0
Textbook audio	3.3
Watching video	3.2
Listening tests	2.2
Listening to songs	1.9
Watching films	1.3

Listening to textbook audios and watching videos were rated similarly and as quite frequent activities. Although the classroom observations were not quantified, these data seem to reflect the overall trends observed in class. Indeed, when asked to describe the typical classroom listening activities, Bruno, Silvia and Federico referred to a comprehension task, with a video or audio from the textbook or FCE preparation materials and set questions. Further, despite FCE materials being used frequently (increasingly so especially towards the end of the data collection), students rated listening tests as infrequent activities, suggesting that they distinguished between being formally assessed and practising for an exam. It is also worth noting that 100% of Teresa's students answered "very often" with reference to listening to their teacher, once again pointing at teacher talk being perceived as a frequent occurrence.

The learners' reported frequency of listening to English for leisure was high, with twelve out of nineteen learners claiming to listen to English outside of school very often. The types of activities they favoured were also quite diversified, as illustrated in Figure 7.2.
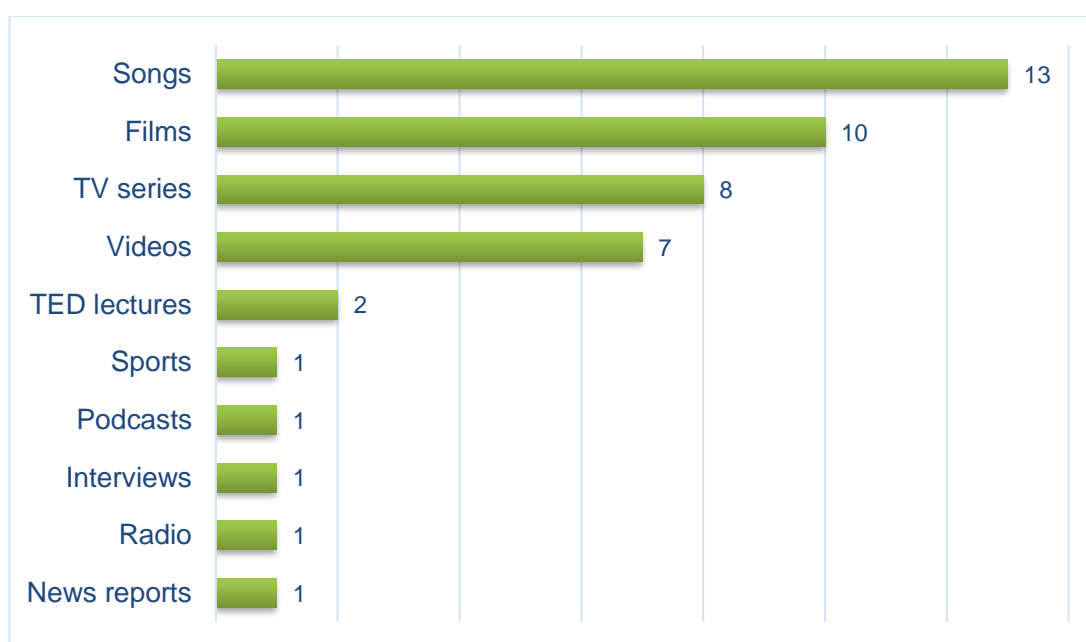
Figure 7.2: Leisure listening activities reported by learners in questionnaires by number of students who mentioned them

The three learners interviewed seemed to engage with these listening materials on a fairly deep level, too. They reported listening to songs repeatedly to grasp as many words as possible and looking up lyrics or specific words. Federico explained that he practised translating songs into Italian and checking his work against more "official" translations. When watching videos, despite his reported

low self-concept, Bruno challenged himself to avoid using subtitles or only use English subtitles whenever possible. One final point that emerged from interviews with Silvia and Federico was that they were both annoyed at how artificial actors sounded in textbook and FCE recordings, suggesting that they might have been aware of the discrepancy with the sound of unscripted, authentic English, with which they reported being familiar and having frequent contact. Arguably, this contact with authentic English both in and out of the classroom may have helped Teresa's learners perceive listening as slightly more controllable and less difficult, as discussed in the following section.

7.7.4 Listening difficulties

Based on questionnaire data, Teresa's students appeared to perceive listening as not overly challenging, with twelve students rating it either only a little or not at all difficult. When queried about their specific difficulties, it appeared clear that while accents were felt to be less of an obstacle than in other classes, the task format was an important difficulty:

Table 7.3: Learners' (n=19) listening difficulties based on questionnaire responses

Difficulty	Strongly agree/agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly disagree/disagree
Multiple choice questions are easier to answer than essay questions	12	5	2
Unfamiliar words make it difficult for me to understand	11	5	3
I find it difficult to read comprehension questions in full if there is little time between questions	11	4	4
I find it difficult to understand spoken text when I'm not interested in its content	10	3	6
I find it difficult to listen and write answers at the same time	10	7	2
Listening and reading questions at the same time is difficult for me	9	3	7
Difficult grammatical structures make it hard for me to understand	8	4	7
I have difficulty understanding unfamiliar topics	7	5	7
I find it difficult to understand speakers with an unknown accent	6	4	9
I find it difficult to understand the meaning of a long spoken text	4	8	7

Table 7.3 shows that task-related difficulties (e.g. open-ended questions or being given little time between questions) and lexical difficulties featured highly in the list of difficulties for these students. It is also interesting to notice how, while accents were, unusually, regarded as not a pressing concern, the issue of listening to uninteresting topics was perceived as a key difficulty, though as interviews demonstrated, this was linked to concentration.

Interviews offered further insights into listening problems. As Figure 7.3 shows, interviews confirmed the predominance of task-related as well as lexical difficulties that emerged from questionnaire data. As regards the accent-related difficulty, the qualitative nature of the data allowed for more refined analysis: when talking about what other students simply referred to as "accents", Federico and Bruno talked more specifically about pronunciation, suggesting a certain level of awareness in their approach to listening. Interviews also shed light on two listener factors impinging on the learners' comprehension: emotions

(primarily anxiety) and concentration. As discussed further in section 7.7.5, concentration was seen to be connected to the level of effort invested in listening and regarded as an important attribution for both successes and failures by the three learners interviewed. They also connected it to their difficulty understanding when they found the topics uninteresting:

> *Bruno: if it's a listening in class, like the ones we do, on something I'm not interested in, I struggle more to pay attention. So far, we've covered topics I was interested in, like Brexit and so on […] because when I'm not interested, I put less effort into trying to understand. I start [listening] thinking "I'm not interested, so even if I don't understand, it's not important". (BI1)*
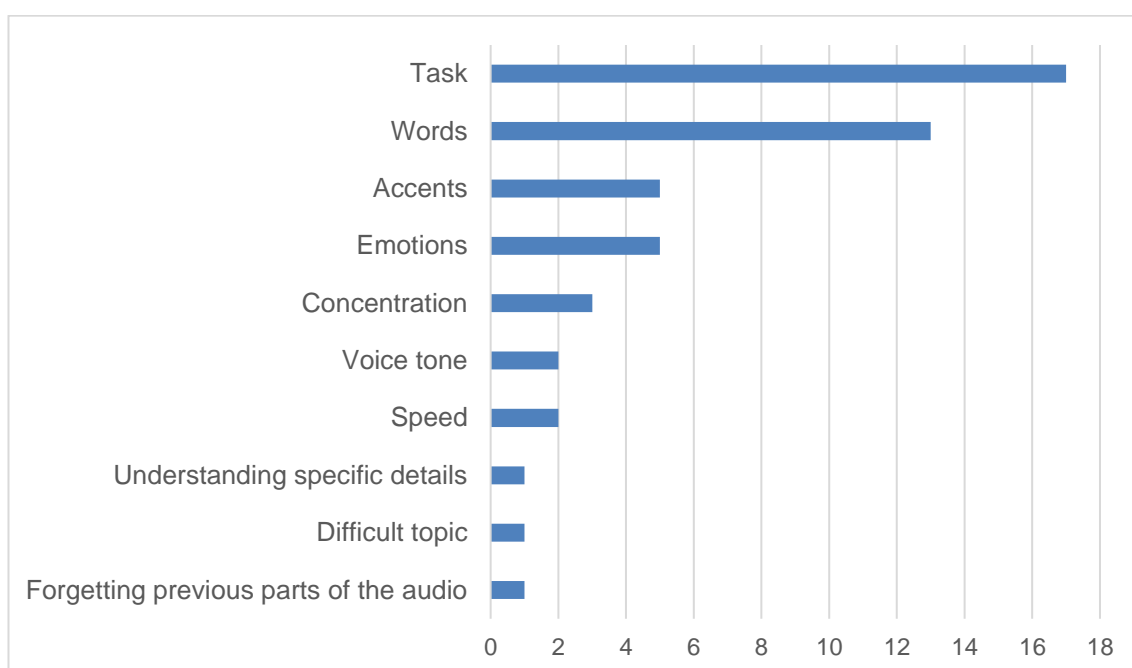
Figure 7.3: Listening difficulties from interview data (based on number of coding references)

The theme of emotions also emerged as a key difficulty in all interviews, where almost exclusively negative emotions were reported in relation to listening. When the students were asked how they felt when they did listening in the classroom (or, in the second round of interviews, they were asked how they had felt during the listening they had just done), they reported listening anxiety, test anxiety and, in Silvia's case, fatigue related to lengthy FCE tasks. Silvia was also the only learner who reported feeling fairly calm during listening in class. A general trend in listening anxiety among these three learners was that it seemed to originate from a host of factors, including the task format, upcoming tests, a feeling of unpredictability and prior experiences of failures, both in school and real life listening, giving rise to a perception of inability:

Chiara: when you do a listening in the classroom, a standard listening activity with questions, how do you feel?

Bruno: I feel very anxious, distressed, because knowing my "non-ability", so to speak, to do these things, I become anxious and get agitated. (BI1)

Listening anxiety and its antecedents thus had strong links to self-concept and attributions, as discussed in the next section.

7.7.5 Listening self-concept and attributions

Overall, Teresa's learners described their listening ability positively: over half of them rated it as quite or very good. When asked whether they could complete most listening activities in the classroom, three quarters answered positively, in line with the overall trend in this study.

When queried about the reasons for their perceived successes and failures in listening, only few students elaborated in open-ended answers. The number of responses in the open-ended survey question was too limited to draw meaningful conclusions, but the interview data offered more solid ground for analysis. Indeed, based on questionnaire data and their initial responses in the first round of interviews, Silvia and Federico appeared to have an adaptive attributional style, while Bruno referred to internal, controllable factors and to external, uncontrollable factors as equally important. Despite showing a tendency toward more or less adaptive attributional styles, however, certain attributions were central to the understandings of these three learners. The main one was effort, as they all acknowledged the importance of their efforts both in taking responsibilities for their failures and in identifying reasons for their successes:

Silvia: today I made eleven mistakes in total [in the FCE test].

Chiara: how does eleven mistakes seem to you?

Silvia: a little too many, but compared to previous times I also put in more effort, so... I've improved.

Chiara: you put in more effort.

Silvia: yeah, the other times I got distracted, I didn't feel like doing it, so many factors can influence this... (SI2)

Especially towards the end of the study, the students started to notice improvements in their outcomes due to repeated practice and better management of FCE task types. Bruno explained this and hinted at improvements in his use of selective attention strategies:

Chiara: Bruno, what did you think of today's listening?

Bruno: compared to other times, I have to say I'm kind of improving. By doing more and more, I'm starting to understand how to handle the various exercises and what to pay more or less attention to when I listen. (BI2)

Although these adaptive attributions were common across the board, the three learners interviewed also discussed a more external and uncontrollable attribution, task difficulty. In line with the task-related difficulty discussed in section 7.7.4, all learners referred to specific parts of FCE as being particularly challenging and, in some cases, the cause of their anxiety as well as their failures:

Chiara: how did you feel during this listening?

Federico: well as usual, like I said, in Parts 1, 2 and 4 I'm okay because I know I can sort of understand and I can do it, while Part 3 is the one that makes me the most anxious because you have to read and re-read again and pay attention. Many answers are similar so... it makes me more anxious. (FI2)

7.7.6 Listening strategies

The three learners interviewed used a wide variety of strategies, mainly metacognitive but also, to a lesser extent, cognitive and socioaffective:
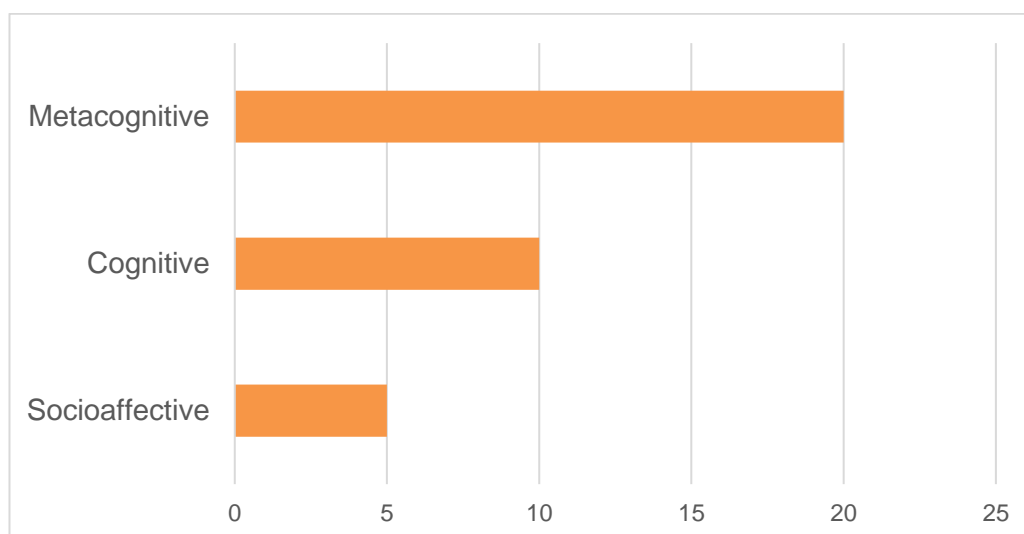
Figure 7.4: Listening strategies reported in interviews

In terms of metacognitive strategies, while some related to selective attention (i.e. listening for details, distinguishing key from peripheral information, focusing on understanding words), many were used to manage task demands more efficiently: as Figure 7.5 shows, Federico, Bruno and Silvia used comprehension monitoring (using the second listening to double-check, discarding options in the second listening), directed attention (concentrating hard, persevering in the face of difficulty) and pre-listening preparation

(reviewing task contents before listening). This is unsurprising considering that task demands, especially related to FCE, appeared to be problematic for this group, and the second interviews were carried out straight after the learners took a full FCE sample test in TO4.
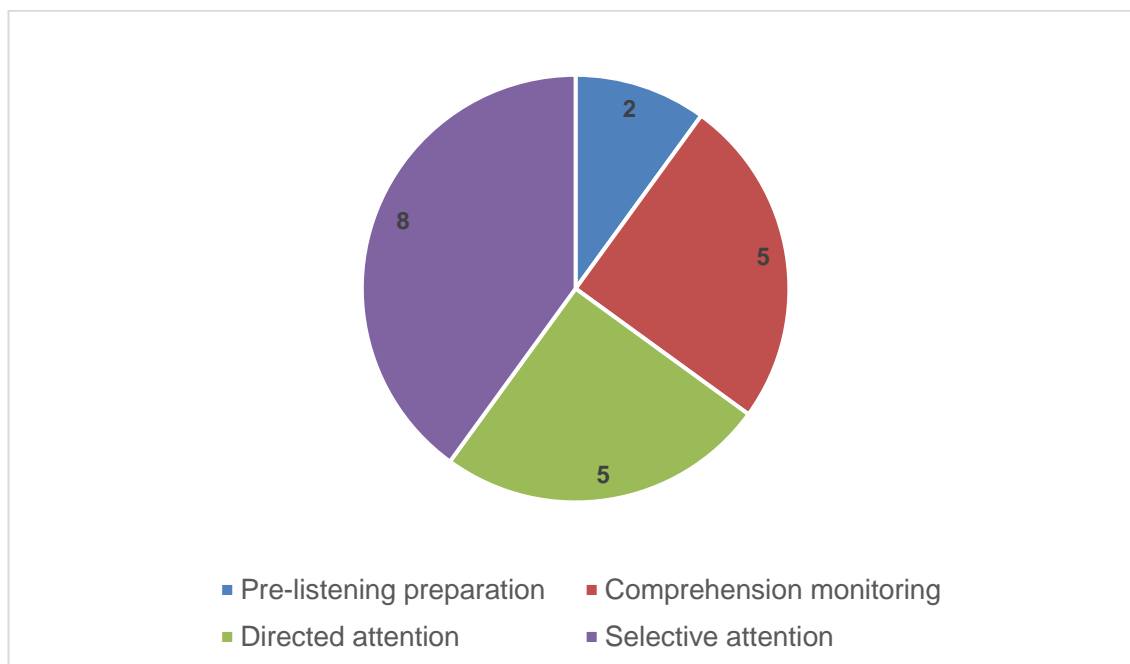
Figure 7.5: Metacognitive listening strategies reported in interviews (based on aggregated coding)

It is also worth noting that among the cognitive strategies reported, inferencing was by far the most used: all the learners interviewed reported using deduction, visual cues in videos and world knowledge to infer the meaning of words or phrases they were unable to grasp, presumably reflecting their stated difficulty dealing with unfamiliar vocabulary.

Finally, Teresa's learners made some use of affective strategies, such as managing their anxiety and coping with messy or incomplete notes. They were also the only group in this study in which all interviewed students reported using social strategies, such as asking for the help of peers or the teacher. Although it is likely that learners in other cases may have used social strategies, it is worth noting how these strategies were described as instrumental to comprehension only by Teresa's learners, who according to her, had been explicitly trained in collaborating with peers and seemed to perceive a feeling of collegiality.

7.8 Summary

Teresa's learners appeared to enjoy and engage with listening extensively, in diversified activities both in class and for leisure. The high importance they attributed to listening was rooted mostly in what they perceived to be real life

communication needs. Based on qualitative data, it was clear that for some learners, these needs were connected to past experiences of real-life communication; sometimes these experiences were of failures in understanding English, giving rise to feelings of low self-concept. While self-concept was reportedly high based on quantitative data, the qualitative data painted a more complex picture and provided more refined understandings of the learners' attributions: all the learners interviewed acknowledged the role of effort in determining their successes and failures in listening, though they also all blamed the difficulty of the type of (especially FCE) tasks for their failures. Task characteristics were in fact among the main difficulties reported by these learners, along with lexical difficulties. Various metacognitive strategies and the cognitive strategy of inferencing were used to tackle these two types of difficulties respectively, according to interview data.

7.9 Teresa and her learners: comparisons

The analysis of this case highlighted some instances of convergence between the teachers' beliefs about her learners and the learners' stated beliefs, as well as some instances of divergence. Further, context influenced Teresa's practices in conjunction with her beliefs about learners.

7.9.1 Convergence

Teresa identified some of her learners' listening difficulties as stated in the learners' questionnaire responses and interviews, especially concerning anxiety and words, which Teresa described as important factors hindering her learners' listening comprehension. Teresa also referred to the difficulty of tasks as an important attribution for her learners; as was discussed above, task-related difficulties were rated quite highly in questionnaire responses, and the task format was mentioned by all the learners interviewed as a substantial difficulty.

Task difficulty appeared to be perceived as an uncontrollable factor potentially jeopardising listening success even despite the trust that, based on open-ended survey and interview responses, students seemed to have in their teacher's ability to select materials and speak in a way appropriate for their level:

> *Bruno: the teacher tries to make the questions as understandable as possible, using words we all know, but sometimes while she's talking in class, maybe if she asks a question and I'm not paying attention, I can't understand her request so I can't answer well […] the teacher speaks slowly so you can sort of understand everything. If we did a test, I think she'd be able to choose well what listening is best for all of us… but if she chose a very complicated one then I would struggle and it'd be quite a disaster. (BI1)*

Students noticing the teacher's efforts to create a reassuring environment and trusting her to choose appropriately confirms Teresa's stated practices. Nevertheless, it is worth noting how Bruno still perceived himself as being "prey" to the difficulty of the task, something external to him and more unpredictable.

Finally, a contextual factor influenced Teresa's teaching and seemed to be reflected in her learners' beliefs and practices: the Flipped Classroom. Teresa did not simply implement techniques fostering learner autonomy and cooperative learning in line with a methodology that was originally imposed on her, but she seemed to gradually have internalised some tenets of this methodology (while interpreting some others in a personal way, as discussed previously). The results of the application of this methodology were visible in the learners' reports – for instance, a meaningful finding related to the importance of cooperative learning was that Teresa's learners were the only group in this research in which all interviewed students reported using social strategies (e.g. asking for help from other students). An extract from Bruno's interviews also exemplifies the FC principle of collaborative learning – which, as far as listening is concerned, only emerged in Teresa's case.

> *Chiara: so all these [listening] techniques you've developed, how did you develop them?*
>
> *Bruno: well I guess by comparing notes and discussing with classmates, some of these techniques emerged... then I think by doing them continuously, it came naturally to find a method for solving these problems... it emerges by doing them often. Compared to before, now when I feel taken aback [by the listening], I then manage to find an order in things. (BI2)*

This quote highlights various key points: first, the development of social strategies, arguably fostered at least in part by the FC approach (although this was not mentioned explicitly by the students). Second, the quote shows how the role of effort was regarded as a powerful determinant of improvement. Finally, strategies appeared to be developed not necessarily through explicit instruction, but more implicitly and autonomously in the form of problem-solving to tackle specific listening problems.

7.9.2 Divergence

Some aspects in which Teresa's beliefs about her learners diverged with her learners' beliefs were related to the learners' attributions, self-concept and listening difficulties.

In terms of attributions, Teresa explained more than once that several learners had low confidence in their listening abilities. However, this was not reflected in

the questionnaire results. Further, Teresa believed that these low self-concept students attributed their failures to the difficulty of the task, which they perceived as being unjustly high due to the high level achieved by their peers. Nevertheless, both in interviews and in qualitative questionnaire data, the learners did not refer to their peers' ability as the reason for the difficulty of the task but rather elaborated on the format of the task itself as being problematic, especially when it came to specific sections of FCE. Finally, while Teresa believed that accents and pronunciation issues were among the key difficulties for her students, this was not reflected in questionnaire responses and only partially in interview data.

7.10 Chapter summary

Teresa's approach to listening instruction shared some of the features of Maria's work (such as a belief in the need to create a positive emotional experience for learners) and of Giulia's work (e.g. her belief in the importance of content in choosing listening materials). She had three distinct formats that she employed when teaching listening, from more rigidly structured exam preparation to less structured viewings of authentic videos for general meaning. Teresa showed concern for her students' emotional wellbeing, which she believed was a pre-requisite for improving self-concept and succeed in listening. A tension arose between this belief and her belief that students needed to be challenged and that they would need to face difficult proficiency exams for the sake of their futures. Rather than simplify tasks for her learners, she dealt with their difficulties *a posteriori*, eliciting their difficulties, discussing them, reassuring the learners and sharing her own difficulties with them. While there was evidence that the learners interviewed experienced some anxiety, the learners generally appeared to have a positive outlook on listening and English. They seemed to encounter some obstacles and were especially adamant that certain tasks, such as FCE tasks, were particularly challenging.

The following chapter deals with the last case in this study, Amalia's.

Chapter 8 Amalia

8.1 Context

For this study, Amalia chose a fourth-year *liceo linguistico* class, composed of 22 females and three males. *Liceo linguistico* offers three modern foreign languages and literatures as its core subjects and it is the only type of school in Italy currently receiving funding for native-speaker teacher assistants. Amalia co-taught with a native-speaker assistant for one hour a week, even though this did not emerge as an important theme in the teacher interviews. She generally dedicated the other two weekly hours to English literature, though sometimes she reported doing language classes. When she did, she normally used the textbook *Empower Upper Intermediate* (Doff et al., 2015) and sometimes authentic materials, such as TED talks and news reports. When the research started, Amalia had only been teaching this group for two months, as she had just replaced their previous teacher; therefore, both the teacher and learner data from the first phase of data collection were based on a shorter experience compared to the other cases.

8.2 Teacher profile

Amalia had over 25 years of teaching experience. She held a Master's Degree in Modern Foreign Languages and Literature. Although it is likely that this literary-oriented university training influenced the practices of other teachers as well, it was only in Amalia's case that this was explicitly acknowledged. During and after her university studies, she lived in Ireland for six years, first studying and then teaching Italian at a university, an experience that she described as formative. While living in Ireland, she passed the Italian national selection for state school teachers, moved back to Italy and started teaching in state schools. She reported "falling in love" with English in middle school and pursuing it despite the uninspiring teaching she witnessed in upper secondary school. She described herself as passionate about the possibilities for self-expression afforded by the English language, especially in terms of vocabulary: indeed, she defined her teaching as "lexical", i.e. focused on developing vocabulary as a precursor to the four skills.

8.3 Listening instruction

Based on classroom observations, Amalia's listening instruction normally included pre-, while- and post-listening phases. As will become clear in this chapter, her overall approach was guided by her core beliefs about vocabulary

as central to language learning, as well as some beliefs about the value of schemata activation in listening comprehension and, to a lesser extent, of critical thinking as a broader educational goal. Contextual factors, especially the textbook and exams, also influenced Amalia's work.

8.3.1 Pre-listening

In all classroom observations, Amalia carried out long pre-listening phases based on schemata activation and/or vocabulary pre-teaching exercises. Pre-listening took at least half of the classes' time: in AO2, it took almost the entire class, with while-listening only occupying the last five minutes. This appeared somewhat intentional, as Amalia explained:

> Amalia: ideally, the listening should come after a long warm-up on the topic, where they speak and comment on pictures, retrieve their experiences… (AI3)

Vocabulary pre-teaching generally consisted of brainstorming vocabulary related to the topic of the listening, often with the aid of pictures. For example, she once showed pictures of three cities, which the listening text was going to focus on, and asked her learners to describe them. Amalia explained how she selected some of this vocabulary in advance of the classes, but also left space for emergent language. She had strong views on how pre-teaching vocabulary was conducive to the purpose of developing vocabulary, which was somewhat influenced by exam requirements, another key factor in her beliefs:

> Amalia: I'm training them so they reach the vocabulary size needed to sit a [Cambridge] exam, so I pre-teach and emphasise some words. […] in the warm-up, you "read" a photo... which is one of the activities that are done in [Cambridge] certificates: the skill of calling things by their name. (AI3)

For Amalia, vocabulary pre-teaching was inextricably linked to activating the students' background knowledge on the topic of the listening and connecting it to their own experiences. Predicting content and vocabulary were among the main strategies described by Amalia as central to listening success and as tools to tackle one of the main listening problems identified by her, listening anxiety:

> Amalia: The listening generally in class… I do it by working on their prediction of vocabulary. So I could have done a lot more, it's also a matter of putting the students in the condition to familiarise themselves with the topic first.
>
> Chiara: with the topic or the vocabulary?
>
> Amalia: with the topic first. So, look at the image, retrieve your memories, and then you expand and focus on vocab. It's a way to facilitate their listening, for sure. But little by little, it's satisfying for

*them and you can decide how to adapt this kind of prior intervention.
[…]*

Chiara: is it important to give them some sort of satisfaction?

*Amalia: yes, yes. Make them understand that once they tune in... if
you're an actor and have to play a part, you have to immerse yourself
[in it] and picture the situation. I've been teaching listening for
certificates [Cambridge exams], and in that case there's no time. But
even just the title, it might look insignificant, but with the reading test
it's the situation and first paragraph, while in the listening, it's the first
question... you know, try to imagine, think about what it makes you
think of. Sit back as comfortably as possible because listening is
something about which even I, if I had to do an exam right now, I
could panic. That's the issue with listening in general: it makes you
anxious. (AI3)*

Various points emerge from this quotation: the influence of exams, present in
many of Amalia's beliefs; the importance of vocabulary and prediction of
content; and the key role played by anxiety, both for her and her learners. As is
discussed later, Amalia's case was characterised by the influence of her own
experiences with language and language learning on her beliefs and practices.

Despite her willingness to prepare her learners and help them with their anxiety,
Amalia claimed to set some limits to the extent to which she pre-taught
vocabulary:

*Amalia: if I present every [word] that may not be clear beforehand,
then the listening is too facilitated. They have to get used to the fact
that they cannot have all the certainties, so they have to learn to
swim in the deep end for a little while. (AI3)*

As she explained in various interviews, although she tried to help students
understand by providing a long pre-listening phase, Amalia also believed in the
ability to learn to cope with the inevitable "unknown" in listening. She described
this mostly in terms of learning to exploit intonation to grasp key words – a key
listening strategy for her and indeed something she pointed to when explaining
what it meant for her to teach listening. The extract below explains this point
(the underlined phrase was uttered in English during the interview):

Chiara: do you think listening can be taught?

*Amalia: yes, for sure. You need to prep it well [laughs]. Yes, we
teach it, it's obvious that they need to understand so you have to do
it. Especially... getting them used to catching the elements which are
key to what they're listening to. So first of all, just like when they read,
<u>don't worry if there are words that you don't understand</u>. Same thing
in listening. It's actually an opportunity, a pretext to emphasise this
idea that through intonation... so why do I recognise key words?
Because there's a stress on them, they have a different weight. (AI2)*

8.3.2 While-listening

Despite Amalia's claims that learning to use intonation to grasp key words was an important part of listening development, no explicit teaching of this was visible in classroom observations, which instead tended to follow similar set structures, with set comprehension questions and two replays of the audio/video:

> Chiara: Do you normally play the audio twice?
>
> Amalia: Yes, because first of all it's what happens at exams. Certificates. The exercises are this way on the textbook and I take on this mindset. So at the beginning I give them only three general comprehension questions, then more specific questions. (AI2)

Once again, the textbook and exam requirements were not only clear influences on Amalia's work, but they were consciously acknowledged as such by Amalia herself.

After the pre-listening, comprehension questions were set to the students. When using *Empower*, the questions were first for general comprehension and, when the audio was played a second time, for more specific details. When, in Observation 4, Amalia used authentic materials and wrote the questions herself (Appendix 13), she included questions for general comprehension and for details – the latter focusing on specific items of vocabulary that she wanted her students to notice, again in line with her "lexical" focus, whereby she valued the importance of vocabulary in language learning:

> Chiara: you gave them some comprehension questions designed by you. How did you go about writing them?
>
> Amalia: I always follow the order of the [audio] text and I try to... when I listen to it, I select the most interesting, key, important information, plus an expression that I'd like them to catch. On a linguistic level plus on a content level. So I write the questions so they are stimulated to catch these specific elements with more attention. (AI4)

As discussed in the following section, this vocabulary of interest for Amalia also guided some of her decisions in the post-listening phase.

When she used authentic materials, aside from these "standard" comprehension questions, Amalia also added some questions for reflection, such as "why do you think the language is so important?". The purpose of these questions was twofold: to help students feel calm and to foster their critical thinking, in line with one of her stated overarching beliefs about education:

> Chiara: OK. There are also mostly comprehension questions and then there are two final questions for reflection.

Amalia: yes, and I often ask what they think in these questions. When you do that, they're much happier, much calmer, because they see they have to decide for themselves and there is not one right answer. So since they are personal, they think "you know, it's fine, it's up to me". This is [also] connected to one of my objectives, which is to stimulate them to look at the world critically. (AI4)

The purpose of making the students feel calmer, evident in this extract, was also key in Amalia's decision to review some vocabulary between the first and second time she played the audio in almost all the classes observed. In Observation 1, for example, she set some questions for general comprehension (i.e. identifying the topics covered in the audio), checked the students' answers and then proceeded to clarify some words before listening again:

Amalia: now listen to three people talking about... which topics do they mention? Which of these topics do they mention? Each of them… [reads topics]

[Amalia plays recording, pauses after each speaker and asks learners which topics were mentioned]

A: before we listen again, it might be useful to see some words so you have them clear: indoors, outdoors... do you know what it means? In the open air. Go on… going on. Impact, something that affects your mood... get to know… it's the process that brings you to know someone. (AO1)

Other than for a general, core belief about the importance of vocabulary, this extract reveals once again the crucial role played by emotions in Amalia's work. When asked why she often focused on vocabulary in-between listening, she explained:

Amalia: I heard the audio, because I myself, when I do the first listening, I think "oh my God"... but having pre-learned some words, they listen and then we talk... in the second listen, I feel calmer and I feel they are calmer too, so they understand a lot more. (AI4)

A feeling of calmness was, in Amalia's belief system, a pre-requisite for more effective listening, and it was fostered, among other things, by mastering the vocabulary better. A personal factor, that is, Amalia's own anxiety, appeared to influence her beliefs and practices (as discussed further in section 8.5).

8.3.3 Post-listening

After listening, in Observations 1, 3 and 4, Amalia checked her students' answers to the set comprehension questions. Further, she reacted to their answers by expanding on vocabulary based on the lexical items that she considered core for a particular lesson:

Chiara: after listening, you checked the answers with them. You asked a girl, then Jonathan spoke.

Amalia: he didn't answer the way I thought he would, so I was getting him to think about the meaning of… oh yes, he said that [the speaker] had gone there to meet people, which was partially true, sure. In the audio there was that little phrase, "as I was travelling on my own", which wasn't easy to understand, so I would have then... it was one of the points I wanted to focus on again.

Chiara: so focusing on a little piece.

Amalia: yes, a piece of language. This was one of the parts that were obscure in his answer.

Chiara: yes, so you realised from his answer that he'd missed something.

Amalia: yes.

Chiara: does this often happen?

Amalia: sure, yes. At their level, it's only natural. You need to encourage even partial answers; however, if something was missing, like "travel on my own", which is one of the lexical elements of the class, then you should point it out. (AI3)

While it appeared that vocabulary as a purpose for listening activities was a priority for Amalia, discussing her post-listening activities gave her the opportunity to expand on how vocabulary was not always an end in itself for her, but it was connected to a higher-level educational concern described in terms of reflection. Observation 4 was based on two videos about endangered languages N|uu and Wampanoag. After watching the second video and checking the students' answers, Amalia proceeded to focus on the word "value" taken from the video:

Chiara: so here you finish the second listening and tell them about the values and elicit synonyms and explanations of "values" [shows extract from video]. Is this still your way of expanding their vocab or was there something else?

Amalia: it was more about discussing what a language is. The video started from the concept of its value, so I wanted to explain... yes, maybe more concretely, the word value and understanding that values is like ideas. The word value is often exploited these days: people talk about identity values so it's worth reflecting on this, saying this is something I believe in or not. So I wanted to stimulate them to think about this. (AI4)

8.4 Listening materials and English varieties

Amalia generally used the textbook as her main source for listening, though sometimes she integrated this with authentic videos, as illustrated in Table 8.1:

Table 8.1: Features of materials used by Amalia

Observation number	Source	Topic	English variety
1	*Empower*	Expats	French, Colombian and British English
2	*Empower*	Research on penguins	British English
3	*Empower*	Package tours	Australian English
4	Public Broadcasting Services and CBS	Endangered languages	American English

Amalia reported liking the textbook and following its structure for her listening activities. The extent to which her practices were influenced by the textbook, consciously and – arguably – unconsciously, was further evidenced in her interviews, when she was asked why she did certain pre-listening schemata activation exercises and comprehension questions from the textbook:

> *Chiara: here you say "there are some comments here and I simply want to know if they're positive or negative. Valeria? [i.e. student pseudonym]" What was the connection of this exercise to the listening?*
>
> *Amalia: I did it because it was there [on the textbook] [laughs]. I did it because the listening is about one's opinion about travelling and experiences, their perception of this experience. […]*
>
> *Chiara: we have the second task and the second listening. You say, "now listen again and answer these questions". What did you think of these questions?*
>
> *Amalia: erm... [hesitates] I didn't really ponder about this much… after making sure that they were good questions [chuckles]. (AI3)*

This suggests Amalia may have accepted and followed her textbook activities somewhat without a critical attitude. However, taking part in this research and elaborating on the influence of the textbook on her practices led her to reflect on the concept of teaching listening in a wider sense:

> *Chiara: Do you find it more or less difficult to teach listening than the other skills?*
>
> *Amalia: I think it could be easy, but actually maybe it's a bit neglected. The aspect of teaching it… this is making me think that we take many things for granted: students should hear the language, fine, but we don't consider the issue of "how" enough, how to guide them and the importance of this. I myself insist on the fact that listening is a door to the language: we all learn languages through*

this. I've been abroad so many times thinking I could speak English, and I spoke well, but when someone spoke to me, I was like… ouch! (AI3)

This quote reveals how the teaching of listening may have been less of a priority and guided by less specific beliefs than other aspects of Amalia's practices. It is also interesting to notice how she appeared to collectivise this approach to listening, referring to herself as part of a group ("we"), probably with reference to her English teacher colleagues. Although she and the other participants in this study claimed not having much time and space for collaboration, it is worth noting how both in this case and when referring to her beliefs about the syllabus and the literature (section 8.6), Amalia tended to expand her beliefs to this social group to which she belonged.

In terms of choice of materials, the textbook also influenced Amalia's decisions when it came to authentic materials. In line with her belief about the importance of vocabulary and her acceptance of the textbook, she believed that the optimal way to organise her classes was around lexical sets on the topics covered in the textbook units. When she thought the students could use some external sources too, she looked for additional authentic materials, as she did in Observation 4:

Chiara: so why did you choose these two videos for the class?

Amalia: I started from the topic that is in one of the Empower units. There's an interview with a linguist who introduces these data, the fact that there is language loss and only 7,000 languages left in the world. We had already started reflecting on what it means to lose a language, a piece of world and culture. So I wanted to make this idea more concrete. They had already been stimulated and the two languages we covered had already been mentioned in their textbook: N|uu and Wampanoag. I tried to make this fact more concrete, as it sometimes seems a little decontextualised, disjointed, on the textbook, but actually now there is so much available [online]. (AI4)

This quotation clarifies once again how various competing factors influenced Amalia's practices, namely the textbook and the belief in the importance of guiding students in reflecting on relevant issues.

Elaborating on the authentic materials she sometimes used led Amalia to talk about a topic about which she held some strong beliefs: the varieties of English in the textbook and in authentic materials. Firstly, she believed in the importance of exposing learners to English as a lingua franca and used textbook materials that included non-native speakers. Although, once again, her decisions were influenced by what was available on the textbook, she also consciously supported the notion of English as a lingua franca:

Amalia: Normally I choose among the available materials and there's lots of [British] English, but more and more in the most recent textbooks they are very different accents. The English that is spoken around the world. I believe [students] must come into contact with this because talking to non-native speakers will be the main type of contact that they'll have in their lives. It certainly helps less in terms of acquiring one of the accents recognised as good accents, so to speak, original accents, but it allows them to not have a fake idea of what it means to learn English. Because the contact will mostly be with the lingua franca. (AI2)

Despite supporting English as a lingua franca, Amalia hinted at the existence of "good" varieties, something that she also stressed in a later interview, when she described English varieties as more or less "standard":

Amalia: of course there were two fairly different accents, which I couldn't identify because I'm not much of an expert, but I think there was at least a South African accent…

Chiara: maybe Australian?

Amalia: they mention Africa so I seem to remember… so in any case, a less standard accent. (AI3)

Despite considering American English a fairly "standard" variety of English, she also believed it to be more difficult for her students and thus saw her scaffolding activities (especially vocabulary teaching) as an aid in overcoming this difficulty:

Chiara: so why did you want to teach these words before the video?

Amalia: to help them achieve better comprehension from the start, to prepare them to the second listen. Especially because the American accent could be quite a hindrance. (AI4)

It is interesting to notice how her perception of American as more difficult may have at least partially been filtered by her own experiences with language and language learning, as she herself reported "missing bits here and there" (AI1) when watching American films. This belief about American English being harder for students appeared to derive from her years of experience with students (and "people" at large). With this class in particular, she identified the lack of authenticity in the textbook materials as one of the causes for this difficulty, expressing some criticism towards the textbook:

Chiara: after listening once, you said "let's listen once again because American is more difficult and the video was very fast''. Is American more difficult for them?

Amalia: yes, it normally is, because I hear this as a common opinion: "I understand English but not American English".

Chiara: from them?

Amalia: not from them specifically. It's a belief I got from talking to people, but generally it's a more difficult language, all sounds are in a

narrower spectrum. I believe that [my students] also perceive it as more difficult. Especially because our textbooks have several accents, but the authentic ones are the British ones, the various British accents. The other ones are often fake.

Chiara: in what sense?

Amalia: it's British actors, speakers, who are able to put on an accent. I often recognise fake Irish. (AI4)

Amalia did not hesitate to say explicitly to her students that American English was more difficult, possibly reinforcing a maladaptive attribution. Nevertheless, whether the American variety represented a reported difficulty for the students is questionable, as discussed in section 8.8.5.

8.5 Beliefs about learners

Amalia was new to the class at the beginning of the study; consequently, her beliefs about her learners seemed to be at times influenced by previous teaching experiences with learners (rather than this specific group) and filtered by her own personality and language learning experiences. Her limited familiarity with these specific learners at the beginning of the study inevitably provided only limited teacher data on more personal aspects concerning the learners, such as self-concept and attributions. The beliefs about learners emerging as key focused mostly on two interrelated themes: the role of emotions and listening difficulties. It was especially in talking about her learners' anxiety that her personal experiences with and approach to listening emerged as a filter to her perceptions.

In Amalia's view, her learners were relatively interested and motivated to learn English, unsurprisingly considering their choice of *liceo linguistico*. With regards specifically to listening, however, she believed it to be an "anxiety-inducing" activity for them:

Chiara: Do you normally play the audio twice? why?

Amalia: Yes […] what I want to make them feel is not the anxiety of having to do everything straightaway because, I think… personally, I don't believe that helps their relationship with the language. Listening is already quite an anxiety-inducing activity in itself. I've never actually thought about this, but sometimes I do play it only once when I see that they've understood, but the nice thing of listening again is that they catch so many things that they hadn't caught initially. (AI2)

Amalia repeated in various interviews that she decided how many times to play an audio or extracts of an audio based on her perceptions of the learners'

comprehension. Listening seemed to cause her feelings of insecurity about gauging the level of difficulty of the audio:

> *Chiara: So you listen or watch at home and gauge it based on your impressions and how you struggled?*
>
> *Amalia: Yes. Yes, when you listen to it with the class, you still think to yourself that you've made a mistake, that it's too difficult. Especially the second video, I thought maybe I should have chosen something else, easier. (AI4)*

Amalia was the only teacher in this research to refer explicitly and repeatedly to her own emotions, described as anxiety and worry, as impacting her. It appeared as if in her belief system, personal factors such as her own anxiety about teaching listening (e.g. in gauging the difficulty of audios/videos) and about listening (i.e. her own difficulties understanding English), and what she perceived as being the learners' listening anxiety were expressed in conjunction, potentially influencing each other in Amalia's perceptions and teaching practices.

In terms of Amalia's beliefs about her learners' difficulties, anxiety was also one of the difficulties she identified. The one she cited most often was "accents", especially American ones. The second most pressing issue in her view was the speed of the recordings, followed by emotions (i.e. listening and test anxiety) and unknown words.

Amalia also identified some features of textbook materials as not being conducive to developing listening. When reflecting on the only lesson in which authentic sources were used, Amalia talked at length about the differences between authentic and graded materials. As mentioned in section 8.4, this was one of her criticisms towards the textbook and part of the reason why she believed her students struggled to understand American English:

> *Amalia: the textbooks are designed for students, so certain things are repeated in the text... this [video] had background noise and so on. It was a news report and it didn't repeat anything, it didn't emphasise certain ideas. There was background noise and words pronounced in whatever way the speaker felt in that particular moment. It's all really beautiful, I mean, and in some way they have to train in handling this. (AI4)*

Amalia identified background noise, a lack of redundancy and features of spontaneous speech as key difficulties in the authentic video. Consistent with her overall approach, she also acknowledged the "beauty" of spontaneous speech and the need for her students to learn to cope with it. She also commented in various interviews on how she tried to tackle these difficulties,

namely by having long pre-listening sessions and by allowing for multiple replays.

8.6 Engagement with contextual factors

In her work, Amalia appeared to consider four main interrelated contextual factors: exams, the textbook, the syllabus and the study of literature. Although these factors influenced her practice to different extents, the relative freedom that she and her colleagues enjoyed in making pedagogical decisions meant that these factors did not impact her practices directly, but were filtered by Amalia's beliefs about the factors themselves, about listening and about teaching.

Cambridge and, to a lesser extent, national exams seemed to impact Amalia's teaching. This influence, often explicitly acknowledged by Amalia herself, was visible in many aspects of her listening instruction: for instance, in line with FCE requirements, Amalia played audios twice, practised talking about pictures and taught what she deemed useful collocations for the listening and Use of English exam sections in her pre-listening vocabulary teaching.

The impact of exams was also evident in Amalia's approach to listening assessment. When queried about how she assessed her learners' listening, she reported using FCE past exam papers. Nevertheless, she only partially adhered to FCE criteria, as she reported adding a final essay question for reflection, which she marked subjectively, acknowledging that it was difficult to assess listening without also correcting the accuracy in the students' written answers.

Similar to other teachers in this study, Amalia was conflicted in her beliefs about Cambridge exams. On the one hand, she recognised they were necessary for her learners' future. She also found exams interesting and motivating. On the other hand, she questioned their financial accessibility for many of her students and was thus reluctant to push her students to take them.

Cambridge exams were seen as inextricably linked to the syllabus and to the textbook:

> *Chiara: Can you briefly describe your English syllabus?*
>
> *Amalia: yes, I try to do the required syllabus for the B2 certificate. That's what my work is based on. It's also the way that our textbooks are structured. They cover the more complex structures and all the vocabulary, but of course I won't finish it [chuckles]. (AI1)*

The syllabus thus resembled the structure of the textbook, and both were regarded as building up to FCE. While the impact of the textbook and how it was filtered by Amalia's beliefs has already been discussed in section 8.4, it is

worth highlighting the role played by the syllabus in her teaching. Amalia was transparent in recognising that this was not a strict constraint in her work:

> *Chiara: Who designed [the syllabus]?*
>
> *Amalia: we have a common liceo linguistico curriculum, but I don't really care about it. I play it by ear. I know I have to revise what's been done before and mostly work on... again, expanding lexis and key things and complex structures such as reported speech and if-clauses... I haven't set myself a fixed syllabus, no. (AI1)*

Again, the freedom afforded to her by the low accountability of Italian schools meant that the syllabus, which she wrote based on loose guidelines, only partially impacted her work, allowing for more core beliefs about language teaching (such as the importance of vocabulary development) to prevail. Similar to other aspects of her work, a personal factor also seemed to limit the extent to which the syllabus influenced what she did in class: her reported inability to manage classroom time, which prevented her from "finishing" the syllabus:

> *Amalia: it's just I'm not very good [laughs] at scheduling times well, because the classes are always different from how I planned them. (AI4)*

This struggle with time management and the ensuing perceived "lack of time" led Amalia to ponder about the degree to which she should teach literature or language. Overall, she was convinced of the need to devote time to the study of literature and referred to her training as a determinant for this. When explaining how she decided when to teach listening, she referred to a lack of time as related to the need to teach literature:

> *Amalia: you'll have heard my colleagues complain we have little time.*
>
> *Chiara: yes.*
>
> *Amalia: it's an obstacle we all have. There is also the culture... we all teach literature and you cannot help but do some things. You can't skip Shakespeare. (AI3)*
>
>
> *Amalia: it's hard to ditch the habit of thinking "I'll get through as much as I can of this literature topic", because our training is in languages and literature, and literature has a high value. How do you decide what authors to skip? But you also can't do everything!*
>
> *Chiara: even though no one's saying what you should be doing.*
>
> *Amalia: yes, absolutely not. Some of us do Milton, some of us don't, but there are some points which... [...] you do them because it's part of a cultural heritage and you have to do them. (AI4)*

Amalia thus acknowledged that literature was not a strict requirement but seemed to believe it was necessary to teach it. She justified this by referring to

the social group ("some of us", "we all have to face [this]") and to her (and her colleagues') university training – one of the very few instances in which this was explicitly acknowledged in this study. Teaching literature thus appeared to be an internalised obligation reinforced by a shared convention, and shared values and priorities derived from training at university level in a specific environment (hence the reference to a "cultural heritage"). When asked to elaborate on how this related to listening, Amalia revealed that the issue was a trade-off in terms of classroom time:

> *Chiara: what would you do if you didn't have the literature to teach?*

> *Amalia: I would work more on articles and... listening-wise, TED conferences, which are very interesting and allow you to go deeper and investigate… but they take up a lot of time. (AI3)*

8.7 Summary

The findings related to the teacher data can be summarised as follows:

- Listening was taught following clearly set pre-, while- and post-listening phases reflecting the textbook structure, with pre-listening vocabulary teaching and schemata activation taking large portions of the classes.

- The importance given to pre-listening was explained with reference to Amalia's beliefs about the importance of prediction and schemata, as well as her core belief in the value of teaching vocabulary.

- Amalia believed that pre-listening was helpful for her learners in tackling difficulties such as dealing with challenging English varieties (e.g. American English); however, not all potentially unknown vocabulary should be pre-taught because learners should be trained in dealing with some uncertainty in listening.

- The main contextual factors whose influence was visible in Amalia's practices were exams (despite Amalia's own reservations about them) and the textbook, whose influence Amalia acknowledged.

- Amalia's beliefs about the syllabus and literature revealed a sense of belonging to the wider social group of her colleagues, from which she derived legitimacy for some of her beliefs and practices, and highlighted the impact of her literary-oriented pre-service education.

- The beliefs emerging most clearly from Amalia's teaching of listening were the importance of vocabulary development and of prediction and schemata for successful listening.

- Emotions were deemed crucial by Amalia, who at times appeared to refer to her own emotions (e.g. anxiety about choice of materials) as reflecting her learners' (e.g. listening and test anxiety).

8.8 Learners' beliefs and practices

This section introduces the main findings from the questionnaire, observational and interview data related to Amalia's learners.

8.8.1 Learners' profiles

The group was composed of 23 students: twenty females and only three males, an imbalance frequently found in *liceo linguistico* classes. Among the three learners interviewed, Jonathan and Nadia had high listening self-concept, while Daniela reported low self-concept. Nevertheless, all learners had adaptive attributions and, as is discussed below, attached great importance to their effort in contributing to their successes and failures.

8.8.2 Listening in and outside of the classroom: beliefs and practices

In terms of classroom listening, the students rated the frequency of activities as follows:

Table 8.2: Learners' answers to the question "How often are the following activities done in class? Choose your answer (1= never; 5= very often)"

Classroom activity	Mean
Listening to teacher	4.6
Textbook audio	4.1
Watching video	3.3
Listening tests	3.1
Watching films	2.0
Listening to songs	1.8

The two most noteworthy findings from this table concern the textbook and listening to the teacher. For the former, the results indicate that the textbook was the main source of listening materials, as claimed by Amalia in interviews, as observed and as further confirmed by the three learners interviewed. When asked to think of the typical listening classroom activity, interviewees all cited listening to textbook audios and answering questions. In terms of listening to the teacher, all the learners interviewed agreed that this was another important form of listening practice. This appeared to be clear to the learners thanks to the contrast between Amalia, a teacher who had only started teaching them, and their previous teacher, who frequently spoke Italian in class. The sentiment

among the learners interviewed was unanimously one of faith that the new teacher's approach would help them "retrieve" their abilities, as Daniela put it:

> *Daniela: I mean, the classes we had from the first to the third year were not really in English. The teacher spoke Italian so I think it really helps when the teacher speaks English.*
>
> *Chiara: now the teacher speaks English.*
>
> *G: Yes. I think this year I will be able to retrieve some ability I've lost. (DI1)*

Developing listening ability was in fact deemed important or very important by eighteen out of twenty-three learners. When queried about the reasons for this importance in the questionnaire, the majority of the reasons given referred to developing other skills or systems:

Reasons for perceived importance of listening (by number of times they were cited)

Learning other systems and skills	19
Communicating	11
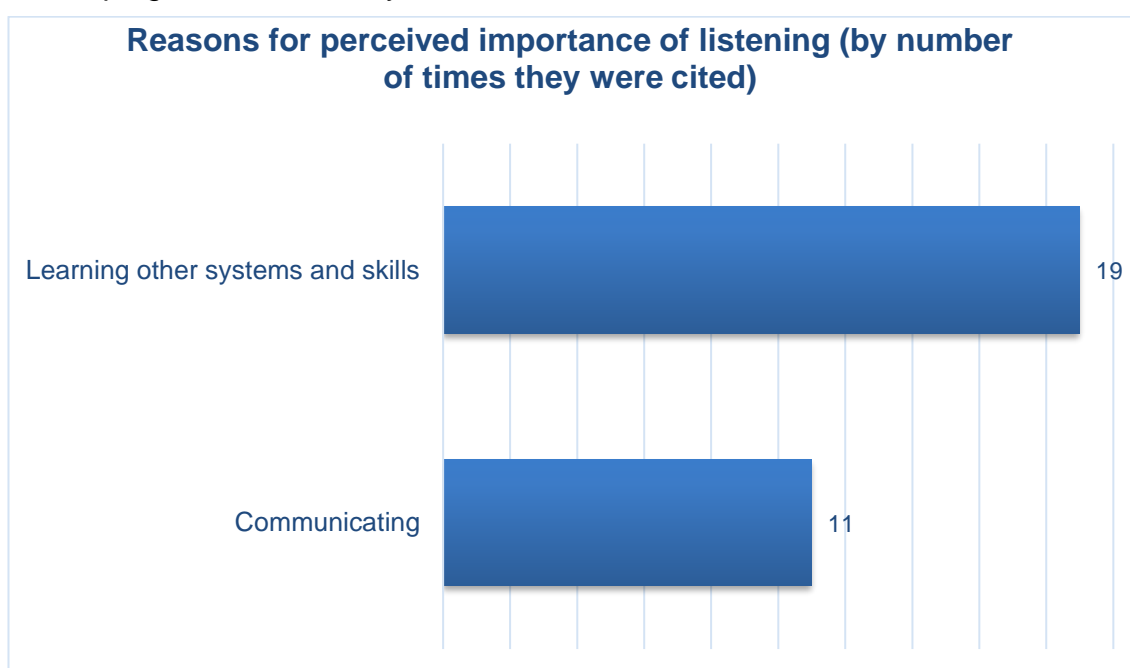
Figure 8.1 Reasons for perceived importance of listening

Most learners thus believed that developing listening was conducive to learning other skills and systems (especially vocabulary and pronunciation, as specified in the open-ended responses). The "lexical" purpose of listening appeared to have been perceived by the learners, as Nadia, Jonathan and Daniela claimed that classroom listening had specific purposes, often related to vocabulary development, with Daniela even specifying that it was the vocabulary of the *Empower* units.

A high proportion of Amalia's learners, 73.9%, reported listening to English outside of school often or very often. As shown in Table 8.3, they chose fairly complex sources, such as TV series and films. Extensive practice with authentic

sources for leisure was a distinctive feature of the learners interviewed in this group and it was key to their efforts, as discussed in the following section.

Table 8.3: Leisure listening activities reported by learners in questionnaires by number of students who mentioned them

Songs	14
TV series	13
Films	11
Videos (Youtube, social media)	5

8.8.3 Self-concept and attributions

Overall, this group rated its listening self-concept as high, with nineteen learners (83%) claiming to be able to complete most classroom listening activities successfully (as opposed to only 71.4% as the figure for the overall study). This self-belief might be linked to these learners' high levels of exposure to the language, at home and in class, as well as to the fact that *liceo linguistico* tends to attract students interested in languages. Further, this perception of themselves as able to deal with listening seemed to be rooted in realistic expectations of what they could achieve and an acceptance of their limits, both in the case of more and less confident learners (such as Nadia and Daniela, respectively):

> *Chiara: So you don't get anxious about listening.*
>
> *Nadia: I try hard. I've never overestimated myself; I try to pay attention because you'll always get a part you don't fully understand, but I stay fairly calm. (NI1)*

> *Chiara: when you watched the video in American, did you understand everything?*
>
> *Daniela: yes, well, yes, but I didn't really understand all the words. I didn't get the meaning of some words.*
>
> *Chiara: when you listen, do you want to understand all the words?*
>
> *Daniela: not really... I accept that I don't understand some words.*
>
> *Chiara: and do you carry on?*
>
> *Daniela: yes. (DI2)*

Although Daniela described herself as unable to complete most classroom listening activities, she had adaptive attributions like Jonathan and Nadia, who reported higher self-concept. In terms of the whole group, among those who

reported being able to complete classroom listening, ten referred to their efforts as the reason for this, one cited innate ability and one the use of appropriate strategies. On the other hand, among the students who claimed they were unable to complete classroom activities, two referred to their inability and one to the task difficulty. In the interviews, Nadia and Daniela chose strategies and effort as the main reasons for their perceived listening successes and failures, while Jonathan selected innate ability (as discussed below, something with which he strongly identified), followed by effort and strategies. All the interviewees talked about their long-standing relationship with English and how they had made efforts since a young age to watch and listen to English, progressively abandoning subtitles.

Listening to and incorporating English in their lives more broadly appeared to be the source of genuine enjoyment for these three learners. This was exemplified in particular by Jonathan. He tried to create a sort of "immersion" experience for himself by watching TV in English daily, setting his devices to English and having daily contact with family and friends in Canada, where he imagined himself living in his future. Having incorporated English in his life in as natural a form as possible, he tried to bring this approach into his school life by taking individual decisions aimed at making listening "non-scholastic":

> *Jonathan: I don't like writing much. If I write [the answers to comprehension questions], it feels very "scholastic", so I prefer to just listen so I can understand more what they're talking about, the specifics and key points so I can then... if I'm asked a question, I can answer no problem. If I write, it's too scholastic.*

> *Chiara: what does this mean?*

> *Jonathan: it means if I write it, it's more useful, granted, in the sense that I learn to write or understand how to write. However, it's like making notes during a class: if you make notes, it's a school thing. It's as if it were an extra effort… so even if I listen my way, in the end, it still sticks, no problem. (JI2)*

By avoiding the task of making notes for comprehension questions, he tried to retain the more informal and natural way of listening that characterised his everyday life. Thanks to his "immersion-style" approach and his appreciation for how his teacher used English in class, Jonathan developed a view of English listening as not just unidirectional, but used in interaction in social contexts. He described classroom listening as one of the steppingstones to "learn how to interact with people for more normal and everyday things" (JI1).

8.8.4 Emotions

Despite Amalia's concerns, listening in itself did not seem to cause the interviewees anxiety. However, Daniela cited listening test anxiety and Jonathan reported being slightly anxious due to the importance he attributed to this activity:

> *Chiara: When you do listening in class, how do you feel?*
>
> *Jonathan: I'm calm in the sense that maybe these are tests or exercises [that] I do well. I'm not saying I make less of an effort, but I feel calm because it's something that I do daily. I really listen a lot, every day. However, maybe I am not very calm because I want to do it well and I'm afraid I won't be able to do it well. For example, I've found that if I'm sitting at the back of the classroom I concentrate less, I hear less, so I do it worse than when I sit at the front. I want to do it well because it's important to me. (JI1)*

As previously mentioned, Jonathan had a positive image of himself as a listener, citing innate ability as the main attribution for his successes and claiming not to have any "special technique" (JI1). This suggests that his listening may have been close to reaching an autonomous stage, allowing him to listen naturally and orchestrate the necessary listening processes more effortlessly than other students. The only hint of anxiety experienced by Jonathan appeared to be caused by the high value that listening success had for him and success seemed key in maintaining his image of an able listener.

This state of calmness was defined by the three learners not only as an internal state, but as fostered by the surrounding "relaxed" environment. This was described by Nadia and Jonathan as a factor helping maintain concentration, an issue that featured highly in the list of listening difficulties, as discussed in the next section.

8.8.5 Listening difficulties

Maintaining concentration while listening was one of the three difficulties cited by the all the three learners interviewed, together with task-related difficulties (i.e. answering long essay questions, writing answers while listening and remembering the questions while listening) and words (i.e. unknown words, mixing up known words and overfocusing on known words to the detriment of general meaning). While Daniela and Nadia cited seven and nine types of difficulties respectively, Jonathan only cited the three most common ones, with concentration being particularly prominent for him:

> *Chiara: can you give me another example of something you missed or didn't understand?*

Jonathan: let me say, most of the time it's not things I don't understand but rather things I miss.

Chiara: why?

Jonathan: because, like, I get distracted for a second. (JI2)

The insights provided in interviews only partially reflected the questionnaire data, as shown in Table 8.4:

Table 8.4: Learners' (n=23) listening difficulties based on questionnaire responses

Difficulty	Strongly agree/agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly disagree/disagree
Unfamiliar words make it difficult for me to understand	16	6	1
Multiple choice questions are easier to answer than essay questions	15	2	6
I have difficulty understanding unfamiliar topics	13	5	5
I find it difficult to understand spoken text when I'm not interested in its content	12	2	9
Difficult grammatical structures make it hard for me to understand	11	9	3
I find it difficult to listen and write answers at the same time	10	5	8
Listening and reading questions at the same time is difficult for me	10	6	7
I find it difficult to read comprehension questions in full if there is little time between questions	8	10	5
I find it difficult to understand speakers with an unknown accent	7	8	8
I find it difficult to understand the meaning of a long spoken text	4	10	9

Lexical difficulties emerged as a key theme in both the questionnaire and interviews. Task-related factors (e.g. essay questions) were also fairly prominent, especially in terms of the difficulty given by open as opposed to multiple choice questions. Indeed, when talking about the specific case of the comprehension questions given in Observation 4, the learners interviewed all seemed to have had some difficulties coping with essay questions, with Daniela opting for making notes while listening (to help with gaps in her working memory) and the two more self-efficacious learners choosing to only listen and elaborate their answers at the end (as explained in section 8.8.7).

The one noticeable difference between questionnaire and interview data was about "accents": while only less than a third of the class rated accents as a listening difficulty, all interviewees referred to the "accent" in listening materials as a key difficulty, providing more nuanced views that are presented in the next section.

8.8.6 English varieties

All the learners interviewed appeared to have specific beliefs about American English, with Nadia and Jonathan describing it as easier to understand and Daniela holding the opposite view. In this group of learners, however, no English variety was characterised as "standard", "normal" or "neutral", possibly signifying acceptance of different varieties as normality. This may be related to the higher language awareness and exposure that is typical of *liceo linguistico* students. When probed further about difficult "accents" in listening materials, Daniela explained that British English was just easier to understand, highlighting again the importance of the teacher's role in defining this belief:

> *Chiara: with this listening, what was your main difficulty?*
>
> *Daniela: perhaps [...] the fact they spoke American, because for me it's the most difficult, because they speak fast and the accent is different.*
>
> *Chiara: different from?*
>
> *Daniela: from hearing an English person speak. For me, it's different. I'm more used to British English, the teacher speaks with an accent similar to British English. (DI2)*

It is possible that British English may have been considered easier on account of Daniela's familiarity with it, given mostly by the fact that her teacher (in whom she appeared to have faith) sounded British to her. On the other hand, both Jonathan and Nadia referred instinctively to either Outer Circle (Indian) and, especially, Expanding Circle varieties and English spoken as a Lingua Franca as hindering their comprehension more:

Chiara: do you use subtitles when watching TV?

Jonathan: I'd love to not use them, but I still have to use them because sometimes the accents are so strange.

Chiara: What is a strange accent to you?

Jonathan: The one that I understand the least is Chinese. If a person has a Chinese or Asian background, I struggle so much. Canada and Toronto are super multi-cultural and if I have to speak to someone with an Asian background I really, really struggle. I understand but I struggle. Also with Indian I have to… if on TV there's a character with an Indian background, then I don't understand and have to use subtitles. (JI1)

Jonathan and Nadia, the more able learners and the learners with higher self-concept, displayed a more confident attitude in general, whereby despite a range of factors potentially hindering their comprehension, they still believed that they could understand (e.g. "I understand but I struggle" in the quote above) or find ways (e.g. subtitles) to tackle these issues. To Daniela, however, external factors such as English varieties seemed more unpredictable and problematic, due to the nature of listening itself:

Chiara: When you do listening in class, how do you feel?

Daniela: When we do tests, for example, in my opinion listening is one of the tests that make me more anxious because it's not one of those tests about knowing something, that if you have studied then you know… so you never really know how it can go. (DI1)

This belief about listening as unpredictable appeared to contrast with a more confident attitude in the ability to deal with the unexpected displayed by Nadia and Jonathan.

8.8.7 Listening strategies

In terms of the listening strategies reported by the three learners interviewed, Nadia was the interviewee that elaborated the most on the topic: while she mentioned fifteen different strategies, Daniela and Jonathan respectively only cited two (i.e. persevering in the face of difficulty and writing the answers while listening) and three (persevering in the face of difficulty, making notes and reading the questions before listening). The breakdown of the strategies discussed in interviews is shown in Figure 8.2 based on the number of times they were mentioned in total:
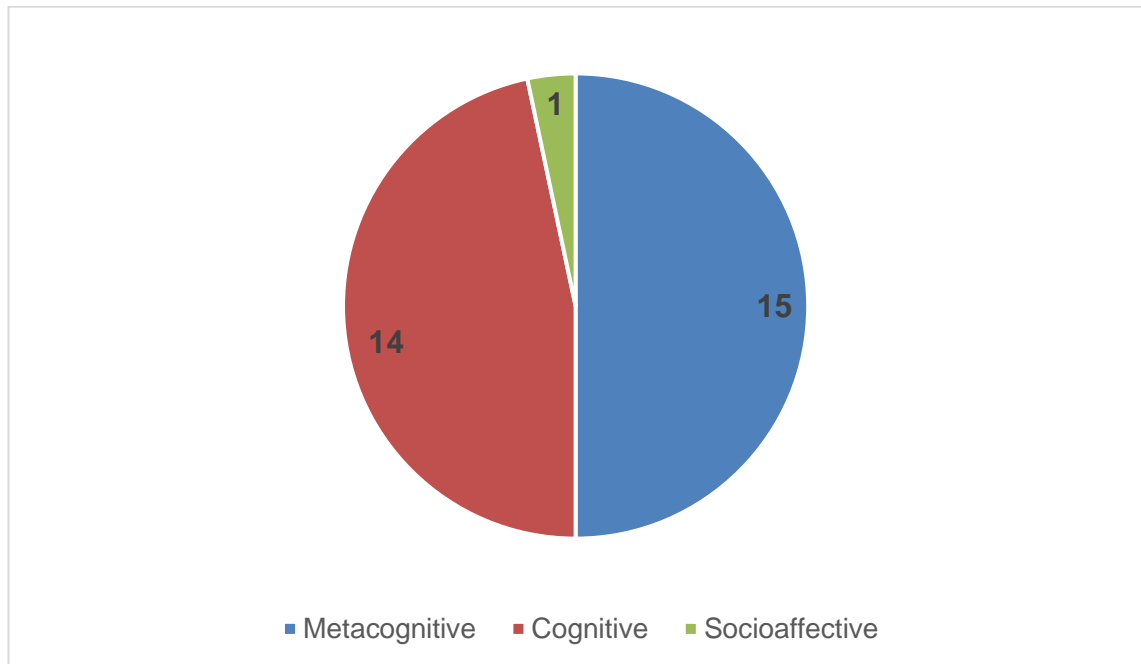
Figure 8.2: Listening strategies from interviews

What stands out from this chart is firstly how socioaffective strategies (specifically, the social strategy of asking a peer for help) were only reported once. No affective strategy was reported, possibly due to the general lack of listening anxiety reported by students. It is also interesting to notice how Nadia and Jonathan, the two more able listeners, reported using strategies to very different extents. One possible explanation for this is that while Jonathan may have already developed a more autonomous, effortless style of listening thanks to his continuous, immersion-style exposure to English (which would explain why he claimed to not have any specific techniques), Nadia had developed her listening, but may still not have been close to an autonomous listening stage. As a result, she may have needed to use a wider variety of compensatory listening strategies, of which she appeared aware. This is also in line with her overall approach to listening as described in section 8.8.3, characterised by realistic expectations and knowledge of her limits.

8.8.8 Summary

Amalia's learners reported using the textbook frequently in classroom instruction and regarded listening partially as a means to communication, but more prominently as a tool for developing other skills or systems. This was consistent with the belief expressed by interviewees that the listening they did in class was often aimed at developing vocabulary.

In surveys, they reported listening to English frequently outside of the classroom and this was in line with effort being the attribution cited by learners in this case

as the main reason for their listening success. Despite different levels of self-concept, all interviewees displayed adaptive attributions and the class overall showed higher levels of self-concept relative to the total student population in this study. Genuine enjoyment of listening and of English more broadly appeared prominent in the beliefs expressed by these learners.

Listening anxiety did not feature as a substantial difficulty based on interviews, while the most prominent difficulties emerging from both questionnaire and interview data were lexical and task-related difficulties. Interviews also highlighted concentration as a problem. Accents, on the other hand, despite not featuring significantly across participants' questionnaire responses, were discussed at length in interviews. They were regarded as one of many manageable factors in listening by the more able listeners and as yet another factor adding to the unpredictability of listening by the less able listener Daniela. Finally, listening strategies were only discussed in detail by Nadia, possibly due to a lower metacognitive awareness on Daniela's side and to listening being developed more autonomously by Jonathan.

8.9 Amalia and her learners: comparisons

Due to Amalia's limited familiarity with this specific class at the beginning of the study, she did not hold many specific beliefs about this group. The beliefs about these learners that she articulated more clearly were related to their difficulties and emotions. The areas in which it is thus most sensible to draw comparisons between teacher and learner data are dimensions of classroom listening instruction, on which both Amalia and her learners expressed their (converging) beliefs, and listening difficulties, including negative emotions, on which both elements of convergence and divergence were detected.

8.9.1 Convergence

When articulating their beliefs about classroom listening activities, Amalia and her learners agreed that the textbook was the most frequently used source. In terms of purposes for classroom listening, interviewees seemed to have perceived that one of the main objectives for listening in the classroom was to develop vocabulary (as claimed by Amalia):

> *Chiara: What differences can you see between the listening class and the listening you do at home?*

> *Daniela: In my opinion, the ones we do in school are more targeted on a certain topic or to teach certain things, while at home it's more... because you can watch any film or TV series. So I think…*

Chiara: When you say targeted or aimed at teaching certain things, what do you refer to?

Daniela: Certain words, idioms. (DI1)

As previously mentioned, this might have a connection with the belief expressed by most of the learners in this class in their questionnaire responses that listening was a tool to develop other aspects of language, primarily vocabulary.

Further, the learners interviewed seemed to regard pre-listening activities, which featured heavily in Amalia's classes and represented some of her core beliefs, as instrumental in enhancing listening comprehension. Brainstorming vocabulary before listening was described in interviews as one of the main ways to tackle unknown/unclear words, regarded as a key difficulty by Amalia's learners and correctly identified by her as such. It was also worth highlighting that Amalia's belief that not all the potentially difficult vocabulary should be pre-taught because learners need to learn to cope was reflected in the very realistic expectations voiced by Nadia and Daniela when claiming that they simply could never expect to know all the words (see section 8.8.3).

8.9.2 Divergence

The only theme on which Amalia and her learners appeared to hold clearly different beliefs were some listening difficulties. First, as mentioned in section 8.4, Amalia seemed to think that American English was a hindrance to her learners, to the extent that she even referred to it as a difficulty in class:

(after listening the first time) Amalia: <u>okay guys, let's listen once again because American is more difficult and the video was very fast</u>. (AO3)

In questionnaire answers, however, "accents" did not seem to feature as a key concern for her learners, while it was mentioned in interviews. It is worth pointing out, however, that the questionnaire item referred to "unknown" accent and the extent to which American English may have been unfamiliar to the students is unclear.

The second difficulty that Amalia regarded as important but which her students did not cite in interviews was related to their emotions. Amalia seemed quite concerned about listening being anxiety-inducing and this caused her to question the appropriateness of her pedagogical choices (e.g. in gauging the level of difficulty of listening materials). Nevertheless, interviewees did not cite anxiety as a substantial issue in listening, and Daniela only cited test-related anxiety.

8.10 Chapter summary

Amalia's approach to teaching listening followed broadly the same structure, including a long pre-listening phase in which schemata was activated and vocabulary was brainstormed, a while-listening phase, where the students generally listened twice and answered comprehension questions and, when time allowed, a post-listening phase in which answers to comprehension questions were checked. On occasion, some vocabulary was clarified between the first and second listening.

Three main types of influences were visible in this approach to listening instruction: first, Amalia's core beliefs about the importance of vocabulary development and of pre-listening activities (possibly linked to her belief in the need to minimise anxiety), to which she referred frequently when elaborating on her practices; second, some factors external to Amalia, such as the textbook and examinations, which, due to the degree of freedom enjoyed by Italian teachers, impacted her practices only indirectly and were filtered by her beliefs; third, some factors internal to Amalia, such as her language learning experiences, her university training, her perceived inability to manage classroom time and her anxiety.

Anxiety was in fact one of her core concerns: she associated feelings of anxiety with the activity of listening and teaching listening, though this did not emerge as a key concern in the learners' interviews. Other listening difficulties, especially related to vocabulary and task, were reported as more important by the learners; even so, the real discriminating factor seemed to be whether the students believed they were able to cope with such difficulties and, more broadly, with the unpredictability of listening. Overall, Amalia's class could be defined as a typical *liceo linguistico* class from several perspectives: a group of highly self-efficacious students who enjoyed using English in and outside of school and valued their efforts as instrumental in determining their listening success. The importance attributed by these learners to English was further evidenced by the faith they appeared to have in Amalia, a relatively new teacher for them, who they hoped would help them boost their skills.

Chapter 9 Cross case analysis

9.1 Summaries of cases

This chapter reviews and identifies patterns in the key findings from the four cases. I provide summaries of the cases, followed by cross-case analyses of the teachers' practices and explanations, the learners' listening practices and beliefs, and teacher-learner interactions (i.e. their interpretations of each other's beliefs and practices).

9.1.1 Maria: humanistic teaching

Maria followed a carefully structured approach to teaching listening, whereby she used the textbook and proceeded through clearly identifiable pre, while and post-listening phases. In the pre-listening, she implemented schemata activation or vocabulary pre-teaching activities (in line with her strong beliefs about the importance of teaching vocabulary). This was generally followed by her playing textbook audios twice, with learners answering comprehension questions, first for gist, then for details. After listening, she checked her learners' answers (calling on specific learners based on whether she expected them to answer correctly) and used the listening text as a springboard for vocabulary or grammar work.

Maria's work was guided by a core belief about preventing learners from experiencing failure, which would negatively impact on their listening self-concept. This approach, defined as "humanistic" and "empathetic" by Maria, included preparing learners as much as possible for their listening (to the extent that tasks were simplified), enacting a series of positive practices (e.g. praising) and setting specific boundaries to learning (e.g. by always using the textbook, choosing certain English varieties and keeping to a regular pre/while/post listening structure).

Key explanations given by Maria for her listening instruction included her concern with avoiding failure (which she believed her learners often experienced in listening due to a lack of effort and aptitude on their part), as well as beliefs about the learners' difficulties (i.e. their tendency to "give up", unknown words and difficult accents) and about contextual factors. The contextual factors that emerged more clearly as influences on her work were Cambridge and national exams (both about which Maria felt conflicted), the textbook (chosen by the department but appreciated by Maria as an instrument of inclusion for all her students) and the syllabus (designed by Maria with a

structural orientation and including mostly literature topics, with language and listening given less prominent roles).

Maria's learners generally agreed that the textbook was the most used resource for classroom listening activities. Although listening was only rated as their third favourite skill and they did not report listening to English outside of class as much as their peers in other classes, they still agreed that it was an important skill to develop. They attributed this importance almost equally to the need to communicate and to using listening as a tool to improve vocabulary and pronunciation. Although the majority of the class appeared to have positive listening self-concept, qualitative data clarified that this self-concept was higher when it came to classroom listening than listening outside of the classroom. This appeared to be linked to a conception of the English used in class as "school" English, as opposed to natural (and more difficult) English in authentic sources outside of school. These beliefs were reflected in the learners' stated difficulties: while task variables were not rated as especially difficult, speaker and text variables (especially vocabulary, connected speech and pronunciation) were cited as key difficulties in listening. Anxiety did not feature as a prominent difficulty in this group; conversely, grammar complexity was reported to be problematic in questionnaire responses, though based on the qualitative data, this may have been overestimated by the learners on account of the importance of grammar as a purpose given by Maria to listening activities. Finally, the learners interviewed reported using mostly cognitive strategies of inferencing and dealing with word recognition in listening.

In terms of interactions between teacher's and learners' perspectives, Maria's was mostly a case of convergence. This was visible in Maria's influence on the learners (e.g. in their belief in the importance of vocabulary) as well as in Maria's beliefs about her learners' listening practices and beliefs (for example, she identified their listening difficulties correctly).

9.1.2 Giulia: teaching against the system

Giulia's practices and beliefs stood out in this study. In terms of listening instruction, she avoided textbooks and always used authentic videos on challenging socio-historical and political topics, with the content being the main driver in selecting materials. When she started her classes, students were asked to move their desks close to her so she would have their full attention. She generally played a video fully once, with students starting to make notes without being prompted by the teacher. She then played the video again in smaller sections of approximately 20 seconds and asked her learners

questions. She chose which learners to call on, switching between learners at a high pace. Her questions were often related to aspects of background knowledge related to the video, notions from other subjects, as well as language points such as grammar, vocabulary or pronunciation. Learners' answers in class were assessed by Giulia as part of her ongoing evaluation, which also included periodic "formal" tests based on authentic videos and comprehension questions. In her evaluation, Giulia placed importance on the learners' ability to answer questions in their own words rather than the words from the listening text.

The ways Giulia explained her practices corresponded for the most part to deep-rooted beliefs about education and language teaching. She often referred to these beliefs in terms of rejecting what she deemed widespread but wrong practices (termed "fatal flaws") in the school system. Her university pedagogical training and anti-apprenticeship of observation (whereby she disapproved of the teaching models she observed as a student) appeared to have influenced this approach. Giulia described her teaching as inductive and performance-based, with language points (i.e. grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation) emerging spontaneously from oral texts. This was reflected in her skills-based and process-based syllabus. Many of her teaching practices (such as her choice of challenging topics and speakers) were explained with reference to a core belief about the role of education as fostering critical thinking and expanding the learners' knowledge on challenging topics. To Giulia, English should be a way to "investigate any field of knowledge" (GO2) – hence her questions embedding aspects of other subjects – and not just English literature. Listening was thus conceptualised by Giulia primarily as a tool to develop critical thinking and expand the learners' knowledge and secondarily as a springboard for language work. She thought of listening instruction as providing her students with a systematic method to achieve these aims outside of school. This plurality of purposes was reflected in her holistic evaluation, aiming to assess all these aspects.

Giulia also had strong views about her learners: she described them as passive in their learning (due to the extreme "predictability" of the school system) and superficial in their listening at home. Among her criticisms of the system, Giulia held strong and mostly negative beliefs about the contextual factors emerging frequently as key in this research, namely, textbooks, syllabi and exams. Thanks to the relative freedom she enjoyed in her teaching, none of these factors appeared to mediate her practices substantially. She also reported having no qualms about proficiency "levels", believing that learners should be ready to face the task of understanding any listening text. This belief, together

with her belief in challenging the students with difficult content, was visible in how the learners' emotional status did not feature as a prominent concern in her decisions, as she refused to "simplify" tasks for them.

Giulia's students perceived listening to the teacher, watching videos and listening tests as the most frequent classroom listening activities. Listening was liked by most students and they reported doing it outside of class frequently. Although they acknowledged the difficulties associated with it, they appeared to appreciate the challenge (as reported in interviews) and regarded developing their listening as important, mostly for reasons related to future real-life communicative situations. Giulia's learners were, however, also aware of the high level of difficulty of classroom listening and indeed almost half of them claimed not being able to complete most classroom listening activities. Their reported difficulties related to lexical issues, difficult or unfamiliar topics (with the associated difficulty in maintaining concentration) and task demands (e.g. reformulating, writing while listening). Interviewees also elaborated on their difficulties with "accents" (especially what they termed "non-standard" accents) and emotions (such as anxiety and the fear of being constantly assessed). Interviewees claimed using a variety of metacognitive, cognitive and, to a lesser extent, affective strategies to cope with the challenging classroom listening despite not receiving any overt training in strategy use.

Regarding interactions between teacher and students' beliefs and practices, various patterns of convergence and divergence emerged. Some of the learners' interpretations of their teacher aligned with her stated beliefs: for example, they echoed her rejection of the textbook, the idea of "good" English and the normalisation of the difficulty and anxiety inherent in listening. However, there were also instances in which they misinterpreted Giulia's beliefs, such as when Caterina claimed that listening was purely aimed at grammar. Giulia also interpreted her learners' beliefs and practices, sometimes closely to their beliefs (for example, as she correctly identified the lexical, thematic and pronunciation difficulties they encountered) and sometimes less closely, such as when she underestimated the impact of task type and anxiety on their listening (though anxiety was something with which the learners interviewed claimed they had learned to cope).

9.1.3 Teresa: challenging learners in a safe space

Teresa identified three formats when she explained how she taught listening: Format A, in which her learners watched a long (i.e. seven to fourteen minutes) video on a topic related to current affairs, took notes and reconstructed the key

points as a class; Format B, in which she followed a standard textbook format with brief schemata activation, listening and answering questions; and Format C, in which learners did FCE sample test practice.

Teresa's approach to the learners' difficulties (and sometimes frustration) in listening was *a posteriori*: rather than simplify tasks or carry out long pre-listening preparation, after listening she asked for her learners' feedback on their difficulties, covered lexical or grammatical points in the listening text, offered reassurance and on one occasion modelled a listening strategy. Although the extent of her actual knowledge about listening strategies is unknown based on what emerged in her interviews, her syllabus was the only one including some listening-specific strategies.

In Teresa's interviews, two core beliefs emerged. First, she valued challenging her learners even with what she anticipated would be difficult listening texts (featuring complex topics, spontaneous speech, difficult vocabulary) and tasks (FCE). Second, however, she believed that it was her role to create a reassuring environment for her learners, where they would feel safe and calm. This was meant to foster their self-concept, which she believed was low in many of her students.

Teresa explained her work with reference to these core beliefs, to contextual factors and to her beliefs about learners. The contextual factors impinging on her work the most were exams, the type of *liceo*, the syllabus and the Flipped Classroom – which she interpreted in personal ways, placing particular value on her interpretation of the principle of learner autonomy. In terms of her beliefs about learners, her "reassuring but challenging" approach was connected to the key theme of self-concept. In her view, the learners' low self-concept was due to a negative self-belief stemming not only from perceiving tasks as difficult and peers as more able, but also from anxiety and other listening difficulties. Teresa believed that the main difficulties facing her learners were words and pronunciation, but also speed, task and a lack of background knowledge. Her approach to tackling these issues was consistent throughout the study: she reassured her learners, reconstructed only key points of particularly challenging texts and tackled difficulties *a posteriori*.

Teresa's students appeared to enjoy listening and considered it an important skill to develop, mostly because of communicative needs. They perceived listening to the teacher as the most frequent classroom activity, with textbook listening and watching videos less common and equally frequent activities. They listened to English often outside of school and appeared to enjoy the challenges involved in understanding the wide variety of authentic materials with which they

engaged. Interviews revealed a desire to come into contact with authentic spoken English. Although the majority did not rate listening as particularly challenging, they elaborated on the difficulties they did have in this skill, referring for the most part to task demands (especially with FCE) and words, but also to accents, concentration (determining the level of effort they were willing to make, especially when listening to uninteresting topics, according to interview data) and listening anxiety. Anxiety appeared to stem from previous experiences of failure in listening, the anticipated difficulty of certain tasks (such as FCE), upcoming tests and a perception of inability. Recurrent attributions for successes and failures included the importance of task difficulty as well as level of effort invested. Interviewees in this class appeared to use a variety of metacognitive strategies (many of which were used to tackle tasks more efficiently), cognitive strategies (especially inferencing) as well as some socio-affective strategies (such as asking for peer support).

Finally, the main interactions between teacher's and learners' beliefs and practices emerging in this case were Teresa's understandings of her learners. Echoing her learners' claims, she reported that the main difficulties for her learners were anxiety, words and task difficulty, and that task difficulty was a key reason used by learners to explain their successes and failures. However, she also maintained that most learners had low self-concept, though the evidence given by the learners seemed to contradict this.

9.1.4 Amalia: listening for vocabulary

Amalia generally taught listening by using textbook materials and sometimes supplementary authentic videos, on which she wrote worksheets with comprehension questions. When teaching listening, she normally started with a lengthy pre-listening phase including schemata activation and vocabulary brainstorming. She then played a listening text twice and students answered comprehension questions. If time allowed, she checked the answers to the comprehension questions and sometimes clarified some vocabulary from the listening text in between the first and second listen.

The main beliefs guiding Amalia's work were the importance of teaching vocabulary (which explained, among other things, her long pre-listening vocabulary work, sometimes covering over half the lesson) and the importance of prediction and schemata in listening comprehension. The long pre-listening preparation, one of the most distinctive features in her approach, was meant to support learners, especially when dealing with difficulties such as challenging pronunciations. Nevertheless, she also claimed that not all vocabulary should

be pre-taught because students should learn to cope with some degree of uncertainty when listening. This was despite her belief that listening was an anxiety-inducing activity for her students, as well as for herself. Emotions were a key theme in how Amalia made sense of her work: she explained that listening was anxiety-inducing for her and that she sometimes doubted her decisions, fearing she had chosen listening texts that were too difficult. Other difficulties she cited in relation to listening were accents, speed and words. Amalia's teaching appeared to be mediated by her beliefs about some contextual factors, namely exams and the textbook, by her emotions and by her university training. Participating in this study made her reflect on how listening may have been a neglected aspect of her colleagues' and her teaching.

Amalia's learners perceived classroom listening activities as aimed at learning vocabulary and more broadly regarded listening primarily as a tool to develop other skills and systems. They reported using the textbook frequently for listening in the classroom. Listening was an activity for which the vast majority felt prepared and had positive self-concept, which they enjoyed and about which they did not feel particularly anxious based on interviews. They reported listening to English for leisure often and struggling mostly with words and comprehension questions in tasks.

Amalia interpreted some of her learners' beliefs correctly (for example, she identified words as the key difficulty for them) and some others less so (for instance, she referred to emotions and accents as difficulties for her students, but no learner data suggested this was the case). Evidence also emerged of some convergence in the learners' interpretations of Amalia's beliefs: they perceived listening as aimed at vocabulary and found the pre-listening phase useful.

9.2 Teachers' profiles, practices and explanations

This section explores the main findings related to their listening teaching practices and their explanations for their practices.

9.2.1 Teaching practices: activities, materials and assessment

In terms of how teachers taught listening, the data analysis revealed a variety of approaches, some with easily identifiable pre-, while- and post-listening phases, others characterised by more fluid structures, as illustrated below:

Table 9.1: Structure of listening activities

Teacher	Structure of listening activities
Maria	• Pre-listening: vocabulary pre-teaching and schemata activation. • While-listening: gist comprehension questions followed by detail and vocabulary-oriented questions. • Post-listening: checking answers; grammar and vocabulary work. • Two replays of the audio.
Giulia	• Initial play of full video; students make notes. • Replay of smaller sections of video; teacher asks individual learners questions about background, language, other subjects, content of video. • Number of replays based on teacher's perceptions of learners' understanding.
Teresa	• Format A: students watch a full video once and make notes; reconstruction of key points as a class. • Format B: pre-listening: brief schemata activation; while-listening: comprehension questions; post-listening: checking answers, teacher eliciting learners' difficulties. • Format C: FCE sample test practice. • Number of replays based on teacher's perception of learners' difficulties (except Format C).
Amalia	• Pre-listening: long vocabulary pre-teaching and schemata activation. • While-listening: comprehension questions, including gist and detail questions. • Post-listening: checking answers. • In-between listening, teacher explains vocabulary from the text. • Two plays of each audio.

The teachers also varied in the extent to which they used textbooks as opposed to other materials, and graded as opposed to authentic materials. Indeed, Maria and Giulia stood on opposite ends of the spectrum, with the former always using graded textbook audios and the latter always using authentic sources. More variation was detected in Teresa and Amalia's cases, as they used both.

All teachers used different English varieties in their listening activities: while the most common were British and American, Outer and Expanding Circle varieties were also present in all the cases. A common pattern was that varieties of English were not a key determinant of the teachers' choices of materials: Amalia and Maria were mostly guided by what was available in the textbook, while Giulia and Teresa's choices were more driven by the content. In all the cases, another key factor in choosing a listening text was the teachers' judgement of whether specific varieties (e.g. the English of "Italo-American mafia bosses from the Bronx", as per Giulia's case) were deemed impossibly challenging for their learners.

One final theme related to listening was assessment. Maria, Teresa and Amalia reported using FCE materials as their formal listening tests, though Amalia also added some essay questions. Giulia again stood out, as her formal assessment of listening consisted of comprehension questions based on short authentic videos. Another common element shared by Giulia and Teresa was that they both saw assessment within a broader holistic evaluation process and tried to evaluate their learners during class as well as in more formal tests.

9.2.2 Teachers' explanations

Based on observational and interview data, some general orientations to how listening instruction was conceptualised by teachers can be identified. Firstly, all the teachers in this study regarded listening as a means to something else rather than to develop listening ability in itself. Each teacher cited various purposes for listening; however, analysing the teachers' core beliefs clarified that while Maria and Amalia conceived of listening as a linguistic-oriented (and especially vocabulary-oriented) activity, Giulia and Teresa saw its importance as residing more with its content.

This view of listening as serving other purposes than listening development was further reflected in the teachers' conceptions of listening instruction itself. When asked what teaching listening meant, the four teachers elaborated as reported in Table 9.2:

Table 9.2: Teachers' conceptions of the purposes of listening instruction

Maria	Practising listening and preparing the students as much as possible before listening so that they can overcome the barriers given by word segmentation
Giulia	Teaching a systematic, productive, critical way of listening to expand learners' knowledge, rather than just for leisure
Teresa	Teaching an inquisitive and independent attitude to listening outside of school
Amalia	Teaching learners to cope with listening

Aside from these conceptions of listening instruction, the key beliefs expressed by the teachers in explaining their practices were about four main areas:

Table 9.3: Four areas about which teachers held beliefs

Key substantive areas
Education and language education
Contextual factors
Learners
Listening and listening instruction

While the first three were well articulated and appeared to be influential, the listening-specific beliefs were fewer and seemed to be held at a lower level of conviction.

9.2.2.1 Beliefs about education and language teaching

The teachers held some general beliefs about education and language education, summarised in Table 9.4:

Table 9.4: Teachers' beliefs about education and language teaching

Belief	Maria	Giulia	Teresa	Amalia
about education				
Predictability in school should be avoided		✓		
Boundaries should be set to learning	✓			
Education should foster critical thinking and reflection		✓	✓	✓
Education should expand the learners' knowledge of complex and unfamiliar topics		✓	✓	
Education should stimulate and challenge learners		✓	✓	
Assessment should be a continuous holistic process of evaluation		✓	✓	
Education should foster learner autonomy		✓	✓	
about language teaching				
Teaching vocabulary is key to language teaching	✓			✓
Vocabulary and grammar should emerge from texts and not be pre-determined		✓	✓	
Language should be used to investigate any field of knowledge		✓		
Language teaching should be inductive and performance-based		✓		

As is clear from the table, Giulia and Teresa (and partially, Amalia) expressed similar beliefs about the role of education in fostering critical thinking and reflection and expanding the learners' knowledge through challenging content.

Beliefs about language teaching were held by Giulia, who described her method as performance-based and inductive, and by Maria and Amalia, who shared similar beliefs about the importance of vocabulary. Overall, however, beliefs specific to foreign language education were far less prominent than beliefs about education more broadly.

9.2.2.2 Beliefs about contextual factors

All the teachers also held beliefs about contextual factors, mainly exams, textbooks and syllabi. In terms of exams, although all the teachers acknowledged the importance of Cambridge exams for the learners' futures, they were conflicted in their beliefs about their validity. Forms of washback from Cambridge and, to a lesser extent, national exams were visible in all the cases but Giulia's. As far as textbooks were concerned, all teachers acknowledged that the English department had chosen specific textbooks, but they used them differently. They had different criticisms of textbooks and while Giulia refused to use them, the other teachers liked parts of them.

Syllabi were also described by teachers as loose constraints based on generic ministerial guidelines. The syllabi were mixed, including skills and structures, except again in Giulia's case, where the syllabus was process-based. The table below highlights the main (i.e. most prominent, longer) components in each syllabus, the other minor components and the references to listening.

Table 9.5: Summary of syllabi

Teacher	Main component(s)	Minor components	References to listening
Maria	• Structures (vocabulary and grammar items) • Literature topics	• Skills; • Functions (e.g. obligation, permission)	"Developing listening and reading skills through a wide variety of texts as authentic as possible"
Giulia	• Skills (e.g. developing critical perspectives on relevant issues)	• Topics (e.g. US mid-terms); • Structures (brief reference to Empower list of grammatical structures); • Literature (brief list to literature textbook table of contents)	"Communicating with the teacher by finding, comparing and contrasting the information necessary to ensure that learners can understand and participate critically in the communal classroom work, analysing literary and non-literary texts, and related historical-biographical events."
Teresa	• Skills • Structures (vocabulary and grammar items) • Literature topics	• Explanation of Flipped Classroom methodology	"Understanding written and oral messages by catching the key elements and context; inferring unknown words based on context."
Amalia	• Skills (four skills and some sub-skills) • Structures (grammar and vocabulary items)	• Functions • Literature topics	"Understanding native speakers (with different accents and intonations) talking about different topics in dialogues, interviews, films, discussions, reports and stories. Understanding literature lessons: recognising the lexis needed to talk about literary topics and understanding key concepts."

9.2.2.3 Beliefs about learners

The teachers' beliefs about learners also emerged as key explanations of their practices. All the teachers held beliefs about the learners' listening difficulties (which they tackled differently) and listening practices outside of school. This was especially true of Giulia, who based many of her decisions on the belief that learners were passive and superficial in their learning, at home and in class. Another group of interconnected beliefs emerged as key concerns for Maria, Teresa and Giulia: they all cited beliefs about emotional wellbeing as being conducive to listening success. They expressed beliefs about listening self-concept, difficulties, emotions and, in some cases, attributions as

intertwined dimensions of this concern with emotional wellbeing. Maria, Teresa and Amalia appeared to be guided by these beliefs in many of their practices, albeit to different extents. Conversely, this did not feature as a major aspect of Giulia's work.

9.2.2.4 Beliefs about listening and listening instruction

Finally, the teachers held some beliefs about listening, though these were generally limited in their influence compared to the beliefs described above. Firstly, as mentioned, the teachers held beliefs about the learners' difficulties, citing different difficulties but concurring on the difficulty posed by words, speed and accents. Listening-specific beliefs were also expressed regarding pre-listening activities, which were regarded positively by Maria and Amalia and more negatively by Teresa and especially by Giulia. Vocabulary was pre-taught in Maria's and Amalia's cases, consistent with their strong beliefs about the importance of teaching vocabulary. These activities were absent in Teresa's and Giulia's work, consistent with their overall approach to listening instruction, whereby listening texts were exploited for linguistic work *a posteriori*. Further, while Maria, Teresa and Amalia thought of background knowledge as helpful to enhance comprehension, and thus conducted schemata activation exercises (i.e. background knowledge activation and content prediction), Giulia was wary of the implications of her learners over-using background knowledge to compensate for gaps in comprehension.

One final listening-specific belief articulated by Maria and Amalia was about the value of first listening for gist and then for details, but the latter was interpreted as vocabulary items (in line with their belief about the importance of vocabulary in language learning).

9.3 Learners' practices and beliefs

Eighty-four learners participated in this study, spread almost equally among two *liceo scientifico* classes, one *liceo classico* class and one *liceo linguistico* class. This section discusses their listening practices and their beliefs about listening.

9.3.1 Listening practices

Three aspects of the learners' listening practices were analysed: their listening practices outside of school, their perceptions of various types of classroom listening activities and their reported listening strategies in these activities.

Learners were asked to rate how often they listened to English outside of school and this appeared to be a common activity for them, with 69% reporting doing it

often or very often. In terms of differences across the cases, the answers of Maria's students appeared more homogenous, with 45% of her students choosing the middle option "sometimes"; conversely, 63% Teresa's students selected the "very often" option.

Regarding classroom listening, students in all classes concurred that listening to their teacher was the most frequent activity, while songs and films were not perceived as frequent features of classroom instruction. Listening tests were believed to be a frequent occurrence in Maria's and Giulia's cases in particular (albeit probably for different reasons). Textbook listening materials were perceived by learners to be used very often in Maria's and Amalia's classes and rarely in Giulia's (in line with the teachers' claims in this regard). Likewise, watching videos was perceived as a fairly common activity by all students and by Giulia's students in particular. Overall, the students' perceptions reflected teachers' claims about the activities used in class.

In terms of what strategies they reported using during these classroom activities, the twelve learners interviewed reported using primarily metacognitive strategies, followed by cognitive and, to a much smaller extent, socioaffective strategies. Overall, inferencing and selective attention were by far the most used strategies.
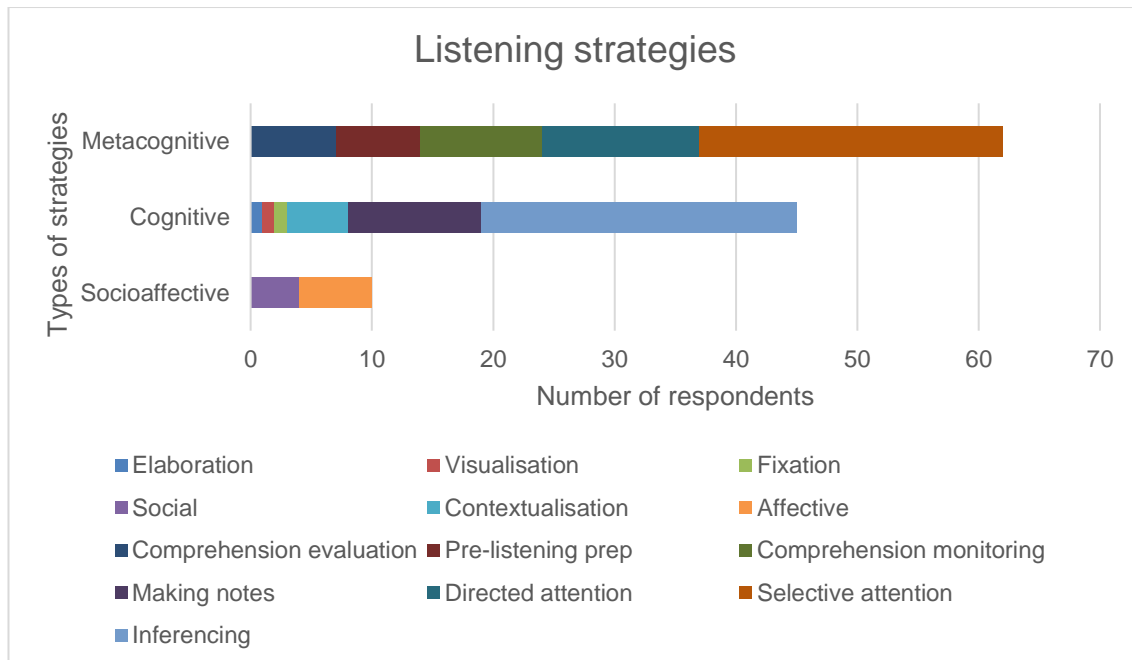
Figure 9.1: Reported listening strategies

One clear finding was that in all the cases, the strategies were closely connected to the types of tasks used by the teachers. Tasks also influenced the learners' beliefs about what listening was and what processes it implied: with more structured and exam-oriented instruction, a common belief emerged

among learners interviewed that the first listening was for understanding the general meaning and the second for details (or, in exam preparation, that the first listening was for tentatively selecting answers and the second was for confirming or discarding said answers). Conversely, more unstructured listening corresponded to descriptions of listening as less fixed and more adaptable (e.g. using potential subsequent listening to focus on parts not understood in the first listening, regardless of them being details or general meaning).

9.3.2 Learners' beliefs about listening

Listening was the most liked out of the four macro language skills, with 77% of the students reporting "liking it a lot" or "quite liking it" and no student selecting the "do not like it at all" option in the questionnaire. This trend was confirmed in interviews. Most interviewees acknowledged the complexities of understanding spoken speech. However, some of them reported liking this challenge, some appreciated the opportunities to access interesting content thanks to listening and a common opinion was that listening was an important skill to develop.

Learning to listen in English was in fact regarded as important by most students. When queried about why this was the case, two main orientations emerged: one was a focus on communication (i.e. learning to listen to understand in conversations) and the other conceived of listening as an instrument to improve other skills or systems (i.e. learning to listen to learn vocabulary, pronunciation or improve speaking). Most of Teresa's and Giulia's learners aligned themselves with the first orientation, while Maria and Amalia's learners considered both equally important.

The majority of the students in this study (71%) reported being able to complete most listening activities in the classroom. Noticeable differences across cases were detected in Amalia's class, where an overwhelming 83% of learners reported completing classroom listening tasks successfully, and in Giulia's case, where conversely, the proportion of learners claiming this level of success stood at only 59%.

Learner interviews provided additional data to complement these findings: in Giulia's case, learners discussed the challenging nature of the listening tasks and tests (two elements that they conflated, possibly due to Giulia's ongoing evaluation policy) and their varying degrees of anxiety and reported success in dealing with the unpredictability of these tasks. In Maria's case, the learners appeared to feel more prepared to deal with classroom tasks than with authentic speech or real-life conversations, where a lack of background knowledge on more complex topics hindered their comprehension. Amalia's

learners showed the highest levels of self-concept in this study. Interviews also revealed a realistic attitude displayed by these learners, accounting for their limitations and establishing realistic expectations.

In terms of learners' attributions for their listening successes and failures, high self-concept learners tended to cite mostly effort (and, to a much lesser extent, task difficulty, ability and strategies), while low self-concept students referred to ability and task difficulty. However, interview data on the theme of attributions were helpful in painting a more nuanced picture of the learners' attributional styles and compensating for some limitations of the questionnaire as a research tool, as I discuss further in Chapter 10.

The learners in this study regarded listening as not a particularly difficult activity, with 61% of learners rating listening as not at all or a little difficult and 26% as neither difficulty nor easy. The ratings in the individual classes did not differ considerably from the overall means.

Questionnaire responses showed that the most significant listening difficulties experienced by learners were related to words, tasks and topics, as summarised in Table 9.6. Caution should be used in interpreting these results, however, as the mean values never exceeded 3.68 and there were no clear majorities of agreement on any item (except difficulties related to words and essay questions). This preference for less extreme responses indicates that the options listed in the question may have been of limited relevance to the learners taking this survey.

Table 9.6: Listening difficulties from questionnaire responses (n= 84)

Difficulty	Strongly agree/agree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Disagree/strongly disagree (%)
Unknown words	63.1	25.0	11.9
Multiple choice easier than cloze questions	54.7	23.8	21.5
Uninteresting topics	48.8	19.0	32.2
Unknown topics	44.1	29.8	26.2
Complex grammar	44.0	27.4	28.6
Accents	42.8	25.0	32.2
Listening while writing	42.9	26.2	30.9
Little time between questions	33.3	39.3	27.4
Listening while reading questions	34.5	25.0	40.5
Long speech	23.8	35.7	40.5

Interview data expanded my understanding of listening difficulties, confirming some of the difficulties that were key themes in survey data, contradicting some others and providing insights into additional difficulties that were not listed in the survey.

Firstly, lexical difficulties were experienced by all learners interviewed to different degrees. Interviewees elaborated on how words were problematic not just because they were "unknown", but due to issues including word segmentation, mixing up known words, overfocusing on known words to the detriment of general meaning and recognising known words. Each of these sub-difficulties was connected to other issues in the learners' minds: for instance, "strange" or "non-standard" pronunciations of words were often cited as the cause for struggling to recognise known words.

Interviewees also discussed task demands. While open essay questions (a task-related difficulty) were regarded as the second most prominent difficulty in the survey, various additional task requirements appeared to present difficulties to students. These included listening while making notes, reformulating and

coping with features of the FCE exam. Amalia's learners reported struggling with essay questions, thus confirming questionnaire data, while task-related difficulties did not feature prominently in Maria's case.

As regards uninteresting and unknown topics, the third and fourth highest-ranked per questionnaire results, learners elaborated on how uninteresting topics were problematic in that they led to distraction, while unknown topics were believed to be a challenge due to a lack of pre-existing background knowledge. This was especially true of Giulia's learners, who were faced with higher thematic complexity than their peers in this study (with interviewees referring to inferencing as a key listening strategy, which was clearly hindered by a lack of background knowledge).

On the other hand, difficulties that did not seem as prominent in questionnaire responses emerged in interviews. Firstly, while almost half of the survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that complex grammar made comprehension more difficult, this was not echoed in interviews except in Lina's case. Further, "accents", while not appearing as a key concern in the survey data, were the most frequently coded difficulty in interviews.

Finally, among the difficulties that emerged exclusively in interviews, the speed of listening texts was the most frequently coded, followed by emotions (i.e. listening and test anxiety), features of connected speech (i.e. speakers "garbling" and "contracting" words), normalisation (missing the beginning, not having time to become used to the speakers) and working memory issues (struggling to retain information previously heard and connect it to incoming speech).

Differences among cases were linked to the different types of tasks used by teachers: while Maria's learners did not appear to struggle much with task factors or negative emotions, Giulia's learners reportedly struggled with both, as well as with complex, unfamiliar topics and authentic, spontaneous pronunciations.

In summary, difficulties concerning words, tasks and topics emerged as the three key problematic areas from both questionnaire and interview data; "accents", emotions, connected speech, normalisation and working memory appeared to be substantial difficulties for the learners interviewed, with relevant differences among the four cases based on the types of tasks used by teachers.

9.4 Relationships between teachers' and learners' beliefs and practices

The relationship between teachers and learners in this research was bilateral: teachers held beliefs about their students' practices and beliefs, and vice versa. The teachers' beliefs were mainly on the themes of listening difficulties, listening and general self-concept, emotions and listening practices outside of school. In some cases, these beliefs corresponded to the learners' stated beliefs, while other times, they clashed. In all the cases, these beliefs were cited as key explanations of teaching practices.

The learners also appeared to interpret the teachers' practices, the purposes of listening activities, the type of English in listening activities (standard and non-standard; scholastic and authentic) and the usefulness of materials and activities. In some instances, the learners had introjected some of the teachers' beliefs (for instance, Giulia's learners repeated her claims that textbooks were useless compared to authentic videos). In other cases, they seemed to have misinterpreted the intended purposes of listening activities (for example, Caterina claimed that what really mattered to the teacher was extrapolating grammar structures from listening, rather than focusing on the content). Figure 9.2 summarises the relationship between teachers' and learners' beliefs.
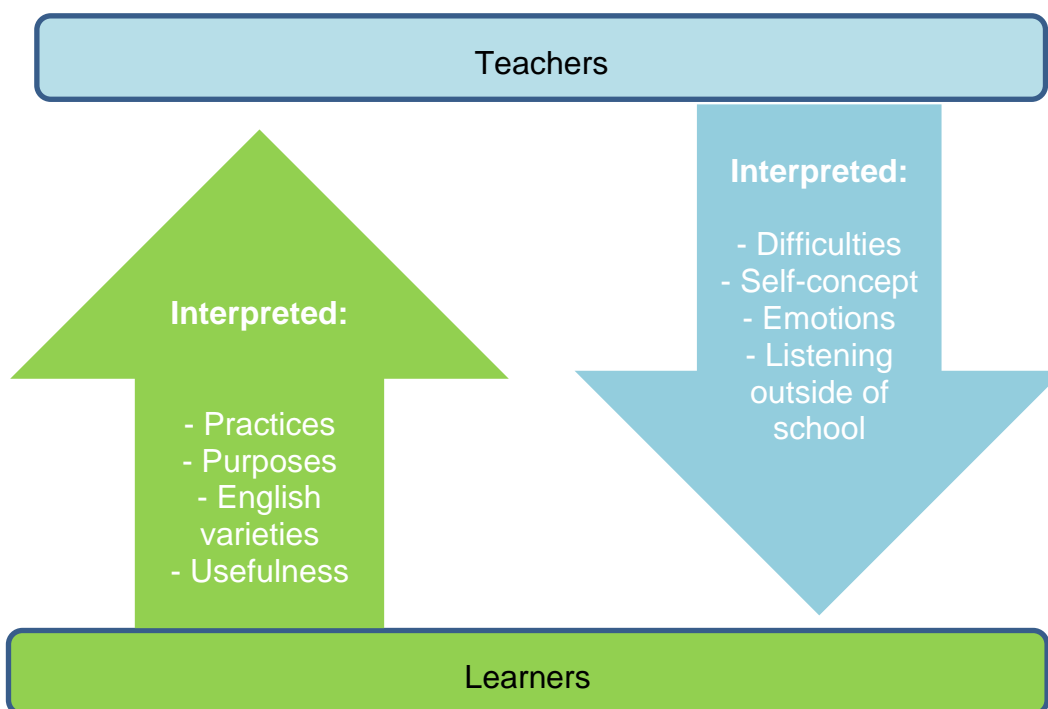
Figure 9.2: Relationships between teachers' and learners' beliefs and practices

9.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has summarised the key findings from the four cases. The teachers showed similarities as well as clear differences in their backgrounds, teaching approaches and beliefs. Different orientations emerged in relation to their approach to listening difficulty, with some teachers opting for simplifying activities and showing more of a concern for learners' emotional wellbeing and self-concept – a key guiding principle explaining much of their listening work, as discussed in the next chapter. Listening instruction was diversified across teachers, with more and less structured approaches involving a variety of pre-, while- and post-listening activities, whose effectiveness will be evaluated in relation to the existing literature in the Discussion. Essentially, however, a common point to all the cases was the conception of listening as subservient to developing other skills and systems, rather than something to develop in its own right, and the absence of a focus on process listening. Teachers' beliefs were grouped into four key substantive areas and some beliefs appeared to be more influential than others. This was visible especially when tensions arose, highlighting how more general beliefs tended to be more core than listening-specific beliefs, thus lending support to the idea that teachers' beliefs are organised in systems and arguably shining a light on these teachers' lack of familiarity with innovations in listening pedagogy.

The learners in this research held views of listening that were mostly positive. They acknowledged the challenges of listening comprehension and reported facing a number of difficulties. However, they were also aware of the importance of developing listening comprehension and welcomed the challenges involved in this. As will be further examined in Chapter 10, the different listening tasks employed by the teachers had a key role in influencing several aspects of the learners' practices (i.e. strategies) and beliefs about listening (e.g. their self-concept). There also appeared to be a reciprocal relationship between teachers and learners, whereby they each interpreted beliefs and practices related to the other. At times, this process impacted what they did in practice, while in other cases, it did not.

The next chapter will look at this complex relationship in more detail, develop the key themes from the findings and locate them within previous research, and clarify the contribution made by this study to our understanding of listening in a secondary school context.

Chapter 10 Discussion

This chapter discusses the key findings from this study in relation to research about listening, teacher beliefs and learner beliefs. The chapter is organised around the key research questions:

1. How do teachers of English in an Italian secondary school teach listening?

2. How do they explain their approach to teaching listening with reference to their beliefs and other factors?

3. What are the beliefs held by learners in an Italian secondary school about listening in English as a foreign language?

4. What are their listening practices?

5. What is the relationship between the teachers' practices and explanations and the learners' beliefs and practices?

    a. To what extent are they aligned?

    b. What are the implications of this alignment?

10.1 Teachers' practices and explanations

Listening was taught in multiple ways across cases and each teacher was fairly consistent in their practices. A key element that was shared by all the teachers was freedom in selecting and conducting listening activities, and assessing listening. This crucial contextual element was key to enabling many of the teachers' practices and shaping their beliefs. This section firstly explores the varied teaching approaches adopted by teachers and locates them within the existing literature. Subsequently, some commonalities across practices and the explanations given by teachers are discussed.

10.1.1 Listening instruction

Overall, the four teachers can be placed on a continuum that describes their practices, from unstructured to structured:

Unstructured			Structured
Emergent teaching			Structured teaching
Authentic materials			Graded materials
Content orientation			Linguistic orientation
Limited scaffolding			High scaffolding
Giulia	*Teresa*	*Amalia*	*Maria*
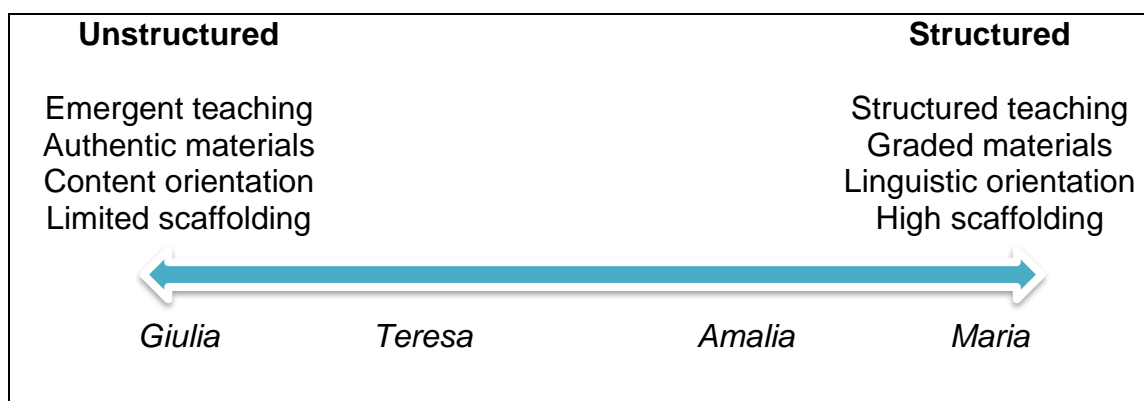
Figure 10.1: Teachers' practices: a continuum

Giulia's teaching was almost entirely emergent in nature, offering limited scaffolding prior to listening activities, which were based on authentic materials chosen for their content. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Maria set what she defined as "boundaries" to her teaching, following pre/while/post-listening structures, providing learners with ample opportunities to prepare for listening and using exclusively graded textbook audios, mostly aimed at discussing language points. Teresa and Amalia adopted somewhat less clear-cut positions, alternating authentic and graded materials and following less set structures; however, Teresa was closer to Giulia's end of the spectrum in that she chose her materials mostly for their content and offered limited preparation for listening activities. Conversely, Amalia conducted extensive pre-listening preparation activities and focused on the vocabulary from the text.

It is clear that the procedures used by teachers in this study are diversified, a finding in line with two decades of *autonomia* in Italian schools (Parlamento italiano, 1997), whereby teachers have had autonomy in deciding on their teaching. As I will argue throughout this chapter, the evidence from this study also suggests that even within such a small sample, teachers' practices are too diversified to be described only as a "Comprehension Approach" (Field, 2008). Indeed, the literature consistently seems to suggest that a problem with listening is that it is taught via a Comprehension Approach, with listen/answer/check structure, pre-listening activities being over-used and the emphasis being on comprehension questions and testing existing comprehension (Goh and Vandergrift, 2018). However, as argued in Chapter 3, section 3.1.2, in spite of how widely this view is held, little published empirical data in naturalistic research exists showing that this is the case. Furthermore, the findings from this study suggest that this label may also not capture the diversity of teachers' actual classroom practices.

The teachers in this study appeared to teach based on fairly routinised patterns, a tendency that is well-documented in teacher cognition research and applies

especially to experienced teachers (Calderhead, 1996); however, the techniques, materials and assessment practices used by teachers varied to the extent that they cannot be described through binary distinctions, as I discuss in the next few sections.

10.1.1.1   Pre-listening

Pre-listening was an aspect on which practices varied. Some studies show that pre-listening phases tend to over-extend (Santos and Graham, 2018). In my research, this was only true in some instances in one case, while pre-listening activities were either brief or entirely absent in the other three. The teachers who regularly conducted pre-listening activities were also those that more consistently used textbooks, which typically include pre-listening activities generating contextual or linguistic knowledge about the listening (Goh, 2010). As discussed in section 10.2.2, part of the difficulty associated with listening in a school context is that unlike other subjects, learners feel they cannot "prepare" for it and as a result, some learners in this study reported appreciating pre-listening activities. However, based on the data available, it remains unclear whether these activities were helpful for anything other than simplifying task demands and mitigating listening anxiety.

Pre-listening activities focused mostly on vocabulary pre-teaching, the usefulness of which has been contested (Mihara, 2015) and which may guide learners to focus on vocabulary in the listening at the expense of general comprehension. Further, similar to findings in Siegel (2014a), prediction of content was not followed by checking of predictions after listening in any of the classes observed, which may limit the usefulness of making prediction as a long-term strategy. A common point to all cases, in contrast to findings from Santos and Graham (2018) (a study also set in secondary schools), was that procedural instructions clarifying task demands before listening were limited, showing that listening instruction was so routinised that students were already familiar with what they were supposed to do.

10.1.1.2   While-listening

In terms of the type of activities used during listening, a recurrent claim in the literature is that teachers generally set comprehension questions or tasks, moving from gist to details and essentially requiring learners to produce correct answers as proof of successful comprehension (Emerick, 2019; Goh, 2010). This was partially reflected in the practices observed in this study. The teachers who more consistently used textbooks did appear to move from a first listen with gist questions to a second listen with detail questions – a practice that, as

discussed in section 10.2, may lead students to adapt their listening processes accordingly. However, these teachers also introduced specific questions aimed at noticing and learning vocabulary or "reflection questions", which learners were meant to answer by reacting to the contents of the listening personally. Other teachers did not set comprehension questions before listening, only requiring learners to aim for understanding and decide autonomously how to make notes. Further, all the teachers used the listening texts to ask follow-up questions about issues not directly related to comprehension, but about interpreting content, reflecting on ideas on a personal level and making connections with other subjects. This interdisciplinary nature of teaching listening, not conceiving of listening as an end in itself, but to explore other subjects and soft skills, is possibly not uncommon in Italian secondary schools (especially due to the influence of CLIL) and is an understudied aspect of listening instruction in foreign language teaching.

10.1.1.3 Post-listening

The teachers' post-listening activities also varied, from checking answers or extracting vocabulary or grammar, to alternating answer checking with, less frequently, some process-based techniques (e.g. asking for feedback on listening difficulties and modelling strategies). Whenever students' answers were correct, teachers generally moved onto something else. With incorrect answers, teachers asked other learners to answer and/or provided explanations for why answers were incorrect, but never exploited incorrect answers for understanding where miscomprehension originated. As discussed below in this section, this failure to use students' answers for process-based work signals an overall lack of process-based activities. Furthermore, these findings appear to confirm the failure to leverage students' answers to identify listening problems or encourage metacognitive reflection that emerged in previous observational studies such as Santos and Graham (2018).

In addition, as far as the aims of these post-listening activities are concerned, Field (2002) claimed that listening is no longer viewed as aimed at analysing vocabulary or grammatical structures. It may be true that listening to dialogues built specifically to showcase grammatical structures may now have become less common features in textbooks. However, findings from this research suggest that noticing and extracting vocabulary items and grammatical structures from listening texts may still be high on some teachers' lists of priorities. This insight was further corroborated by the analysis of their beliefs, which revealed core beliefs about the importance of vocabulary and beliefs

about listening being subordinate to the development of other skills and systems (see section 10.1.2).

10.1.1.4   Materials and English varieties

The materials used by teachers also varied widely, from textbooks and graded materials to authentic materials, including several different English varieties (which, however, were never the key factor in teachers' choice of materials), including Inner, Outer and Expanding Circle Englishes. This multiplicity of sources and varieties reflects how textbooks are being more and more often integrated with authentic listening sources, whose availability has increased exponentially in recent years (Akbari and Razavi, 2016; Richards, J., 2015).

Further, English as a lingua franca and Outer/Expanding Circle varieties of English were acknowledged by the teacher participants, reflecting arguments about their importance in English language teaching (Jenkins, 2006). This stands in partial contrast, however, with the conclusions drawn by Vettorel and Lopriore (2013) based on their analysis of textbooks in Italian secondary schools. They found that Outer and Expanding circle varieties were increasingly present in textbook listening activities, but mostly featuring non-native speakers interacting with native speakers in Inner Circle contexts. They argue that textbooks have traditionally served as key tools for familiarising Italian school teachers with methodological innovations, but that this has not happened with regards to ELF and World Englishes. Although the teachers in my study did still make reference to idealised "good" Inner Circle varieties (with one even describing "non-standard" varieties in pejorative terms), they also all acknowledged the importance of exposing learners to ELF, as this would be the main type of interactions in their futures. This ambivalent, or perhaps shifting, position reflects points made by Santipolo (2017) that awareness about English as a global language has increased in Italy over recent years, with a tentative acknowledgment of its importance in governmental documents (e.g. MIUR, 2020a), though some classroom practice still reflects the British/American dichotomy.

10.1.1.5   Defining listening teaching practices in this research: key aspects

The teaching of listening varied substantially among teachers; nevertheless, a key common point to the four approaches was the absence of an explicit focus on developing the processes of listening, except arguably some top-down processes. As noted by various commentators, a tendency exists in listening instruction to encourage learners to listen for key words or make inferences

based on background knowledge, essentially focusing on the development of top-down strategies at the expense of bottom-up decoding work, which is aimed at developing the ability to recognise sounds, syllables and words (Vandergrift, 2004; Siegel and Siegel, 2013). For the most part, this was reflected in the practices observed in this study, except arguably when teachers asked learners to identify specific words in the stream of speech. The aim of these activities as expressed by teachers, however, was to identify words to learn them rather than being part of a systematic approach to practising word recognition. Leveraging listening to learn vocabulary was part of a broader conception of listening as aimed at the development of other language skills and systems, as well as non-linguistic skills and subjects, rather than listening itself. Although the teachers appeared to be aware of the difficult nature of listening comprehension, their response to this was not to facilitate practice of the processes of listening, but rather to tackle them either in a predictive way (i.e. by pre-teaching as much as possible to prepare students) or in an interactive way (i.e. not preparing students, but rather engaging with their ongoing levels of understanding to decide whether to replay the listening or specific sections). An attempt was made by one teacher to elicit her learners' difficulties and model a strategy for them on one occasion, but listening was generally not used *diagnostically* (Field 2008), that is, to identify learners' listening problems and propose dedicated remedial exercises. To the teachers in this study, the most pressing concern was not developing listening processes, but rather giving students a "method" or "structure" to listen to English productively.

Overall, the findings from this study about how listening was taught reveal the limitations of the Comprehension Approach label in adequately capturing the variability and complexity of listening instruction when this is studied in naturalistic environments through observational data. This echoes the concerns of Graham et al. (2014), another study similarly based on observational and self-report data from schools. In acknowledging the complexity of their findings with reference to the CA label, they state:

> *"we argue for a more nuanced label for the pedagogical approach we have uncovered, that goes beyond an emphasis on mere comprehension, but which also involves institutional and contextual control, the following of almost ritualised procedures to ensure predictability, maximum correct answers and to shield learners from any challenge or uncertainty" (p. 54).*

While some elements of this definition are common to some teachers in the present study, others, such as institutional and contextual control, do not apply. This highlights the importance of context and collective teachers' beliefs (discussed further in 10.1.2.2) in determining pedagogical choices, a factor that

may be overlooked when using labels such as Comprehension Approach. Defining current practice only as comprehension-oriented fails to acknowledge the diversity and complexity of teachers' practices. Moreover, it may inadvertently position teachers as deficient, whereas in reality, their pedagogical decisions may be based on contextually relevant needs and priorities. In the school examined in this study, this is evident in the view of listening as serving other linguistic or non-linguistic purposes (such as the development of critical thinking or notions from other subjects).

The first, which can be termed listening for acquisition (Richards, J., 2005), appeared to be a key concern for two of the teachers in this research. In advocating for a process approach to listening instruction, commentators such as Field (2008) claim that listening for acquisition has been replaced by a focus on comprehension. A shift from acquisition to comprehension, however, fails to acknowledge the value of listening for language acquisition in classroom instruction. Recent research into the role of listening for vocabulary acquisition, has shown that intentional approaches to vocabulary learning, such as contrastive focus on form in listening activities, can contribute to vocabulary acquisition: indeed, Zhang, P. and Graham (2019, p. 18) claim that learners need "both [..] to focus on listening in its own right, and to experience oral input with Contrastive Focus-on-Form teacher explanations as a way to enhance vocabulary knowledge". Consequently, an integrated approach to listening instruction may keep this important purpose for listening into account.

The second concern, related to using listening to develop non-linguistic purposes (e.g. critical thinking or notions from other subjects) is indeed a distinctive part of secondary school teaching in this context: although introducing a focus on listening processes might be beneficial for learners, these other purposes were perceived as essential to listening instruction in this environment. As I discuss in Chapter 11, if school teachers hold deep-rooted beliefs about listening being subservient to non-linguistic purposes, any attempt to introduce process-based instruction is more likely to be successful if it also allows for a role of listening as serving other interdisciplinary purposes.

10.1.2   Teachers' explanations: beliefs and context

Although the focus of the study was listening instruction, teachers did not tend to think about listening instruction in its own right. Rather, they saw classroom listening as subordinate to the development of other skills. They conceived of listening instruction as teaching learners a systematic study method (consistent with the importance of study skills in Italian secondary schools) or teaching

them to "cope" with listening difficulties (which, however, did not appear to translate to explicitly teaching them strategies). This partially confirms one of the orientations to listening instruction reviewed in the Literature Review (section 3.3), seeing listening as subordinate or enabling other language skills and systems. However, this study unveiled an additional layer to this orientation, as listening was viewed as part of a wider educational approach. As discussed below, specific beliefs about listening appeared to be held at a lower level of conviction compared to broader beliefs about education, with the latter often superseding the former. This view is likely to be common especially in Italian state schools, where teachers' pedagogical training in how to teach listening is limited. Further, language teaching in schools may be more in line with higher order educational concerns, as teachers see themselves more as all-round educators than simply language teachers.

Consequently, the teachers' beliefs about listening were not specific, they were at times influenced by exam and textbook formats, and generally expressed in connection with other beliefs. The teachers held beliefs about other topics, which appeared to be more influential in their practices. As discussed in Chapter 9, teachers' beliefs can be categorised in four key categories, common to all the cases:

- Beliefs about education and language teaching
- Beliefs about contextual factors
- Beliefs about learners
- Beliefs about listening and listening instruction

10.1.2.1 Beliefs about education and language teaching

Beliefs about education and language teaching frequently appeared to be more influential than beliefs about listening. Most of the beliefs about education and language teaching were expressed by Giulia, who not only held strong opinions but also had the most pedagogy-oriented (rather than literature-oriented) training. Giulia represents a unique case in this research. Her actions were often explained with reference to what she saw as "fatal flaws" in the education system, from which she sought to distance herself, and with some references to a more pedagogically grounded approach to language teaching.

This study also provides evidence supporting the notion that beliefs do not exist in isolation, but are organised in systems, with some beliefs being core and held more firmly, and other being peripheral (Green, 1971). In particular, Breen et al. (2001) suggested that teachers hold beliefs about education on a more abstract level, as well as more concrete and topic-specific beliefs. The enactment of

these "abstract" beliefs is mediated by teaching situations and classroom cultures, which broadly correspond to the contextual factors analysed in this research. Considering that Giulia hardly ever conceptualised her teaching as influenced by contextual factors, it follows that these general beliefs about education shaped her practices mostly without being filtered by contextual factors. Within her belief system, broader beliefs about education also overrode more listening-specific considerations when tensions between the two arose (see examples in 6.4). The role of broader educational beliefs is also confirmed in previous studies, such as Farrell and Ives (2014) and Phipps and Borg (2009). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that these studies were set in university contexts. Consequently, they may not incorporate a dimension in which teachers are viewed as all-round educators (rather than mostly language teachers) to the same extent as this seems to be evident in school environments. This dimension emerged in this study and helps better understand the role of broader educational beliefs in these teachers' belief systems.

Indeed, a closer analysis of these broad beliefs about education reveals two main orientations to teaching and learning detected among school teachers in OECD (2019) and OECD (2009): a direct transmission view and a constructivist view. The former sees a teacher's role as communicating knowledge in a clear and structured manner, explaining solutions and fostering concentration and a calm classroom environment. This reflects some of the beliefs expressed by the teachers that were positioned on the right end of the continuum in Figure 10.1: for example, that boundaries should be set to learning or that it is a teacher's responsibility to foster a calm classroom environment and state of mind in their learners. Conversely, constructivism sees students as active participants in knowledge construction, with the emphasis being on developing problem-solving and critical thinking rather than merely knowledge acquisition. This orientation corresponded to the beliefs expressed by teachers on the opposite end of the continuum, such as that education should foster critical thinking and expand the learners' knowledge of complex and unfamiliar topics or, in relation to language teaching specifically, that vocabulary and grammar should emerge from texts and not be pre-determined.

The two orientations described above are not mutually exclusive and while some teachers were aligned more clearly with one or the other orientation, others held beliefs ascribable to both. Since listening was conceived of as part of a broader educational approach, it is then worth noting that research on language teachers in secondary school contexts might benefit from a wider perspective encompassing teachers' approaches as all-round educators, rather

than simply language teachers – a perspective that may contribute to a more thorough understanding of the ways teachers conceptualise their work, as discussed in Chapter 11.

10.1.2.2   Beliefs about contextual factors

This study extends our understanding of the role played by contextual factors in teachers' beliefs and practices. As mentioned in section 3.2.3, contextual factors are often analysed in teacher cognition research as *external* to the teacher and directly impacting their practices. As Sanchez and Borg (2014) argue, however, rather than an objective reality, contextual factors may be examined as elements of the context filtered through teachers' beliefs. In the present research, the key contextual factors, that is, exams, teaching literature, textbooks and national guidelines, did not impact teachers' practices *directly* due to two key elements in this research: the lack of accountability and the freedom that teachers had in their work.

It should be noted that while in other studies learners are also considered contextual factors, in this research they were regarded as full-fledged participants. Further, aside from some examples, teachers generally had generalised beliefs about learners. Consequently, students were not regarded as contextual factors in the system described in Figure 10.2.

When asked about contextual factors, Maria, Teresa and Amalia did appear to regard them as real constraints on their work; however, Giulia's contributions made clear that these factors did not impact the teachers *directly*, as there was no strict requirement for them to follow set syllabi, prepare students for Cambridge exams or use textbooks. Rather, these contextual factors were collectively understood by teachers in similar ways: in other words, teachers held collective beliefs about these contextual factors as being influences on their work. As shown in Figure 10.2, these collective beliefs ultimately impacted the teachers' practices only when they did not hold any strong opposing personal beliefs: this was the case with Amalia, Teresa and Maria. Conversely, as Giulia held some strong beliefs which stood in contrast to these collective beliefs about contextual factors, her practices were not generally influenced by them. As an example, when the teachers discussed how exam requirements influenced their listening instruction, Amalia, Teresa and Maria elaborated on their negative beliefs regarding these exams; nevertheless, they still perceived them as an important requirement and mentioned how this was a collectively held belief. This collective belief overrode their personal convictions, resulting in all of them incorporating some exam preparation in their classes. Conversely, Giulia held some very strong beliefs against teaching-to-the test, and while she

acknowledged the existence of a collective belief in the importance of exams, she refused to let this influence her teaching.
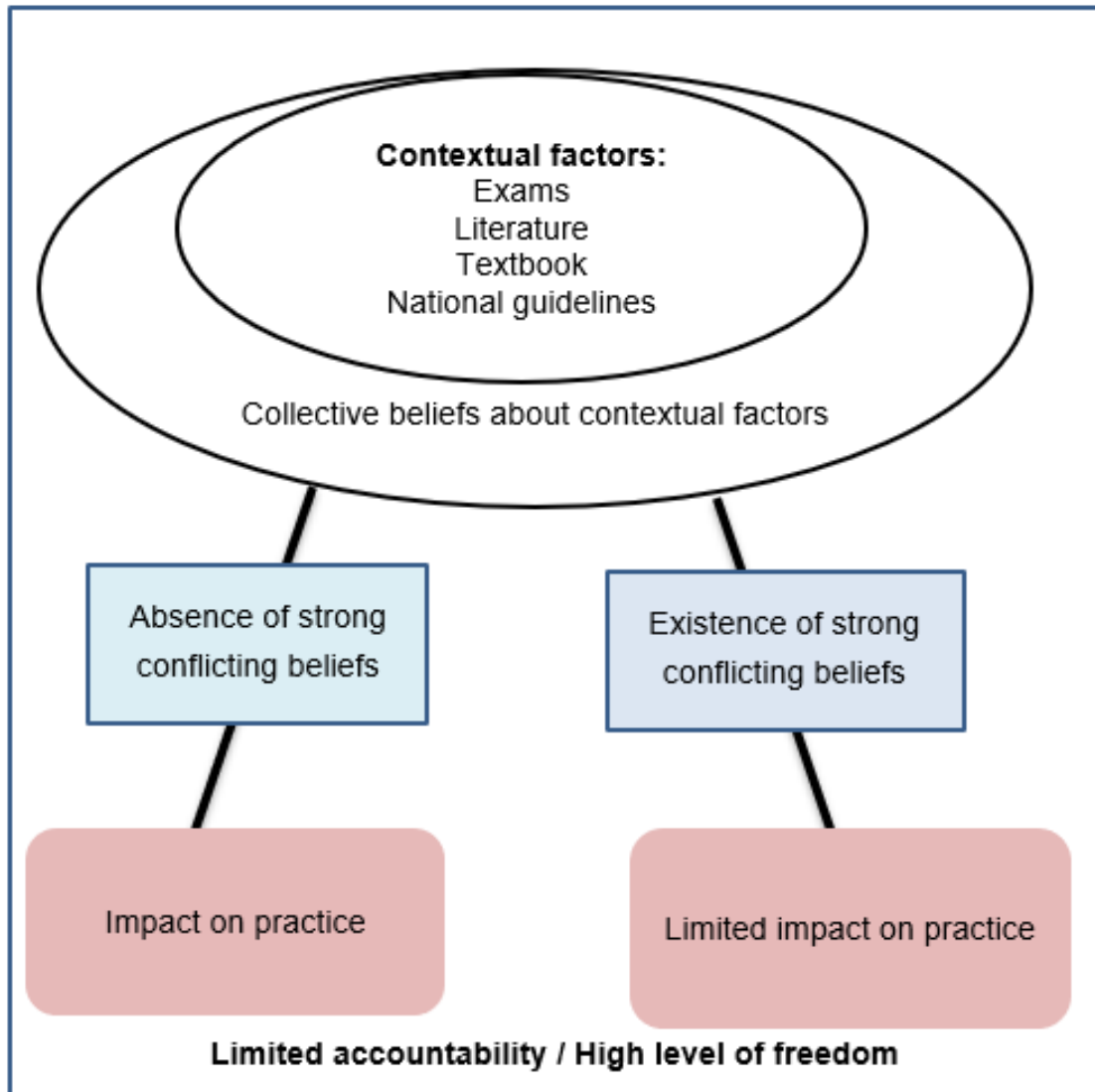
Figure 10.2: The impact of contextual factors on teachers' beliefs and practices

This study thus contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how contextual factors may impact practices indirectly, through the collective understandings of teachers in given contexts, and be mediated by the degree of accountability and freedom enjoyed by teachers as well as the existence of other competing beliefs. In school contexts, the overwhelming majority of the school teachers surveyed in OECD (2019) report having control over teaching methods, course content, assessment and homework. Consequently, in environments where teachers' accountability may be low (such as Italy) and teachers have relative freedom to decide, it is worth examining the extent to which their instructional practices may be directly ascribable to contextual constraints or rather mediated by their individual beliefs, collective beliefs and cultural understandings.

In light of this, the examination of context in teacher cognition studies in environments where teachers have freedom to make decisions can adopt a view of context that differentiates between contextual *factors*, contextual *influences* and contextual *constraints*. All school environments will include some contextual factors, those entities *external* to teachers mentioned above. When teachers' beliefs are studied, however, contextual factors can become contextual influences, when they are acknowledged as such by teachers but do not necessarily impact their practices directly, or contextual constraints, when teachers not only acknowledge them as influences, but also view them as inevitable constraints on their practices.

The beliefs held collectively by the teachers in this study (e.g. believing in the necessity to teach English literature or prepare learners for Cambridge exams) also hint at some key sources of teacher beliefs: cultural understandings, prior schooling and teacher education. It is known that teachers arrive in the teaching profession with established beliefs derived from their experiences of schooling, a phenomenon termed apprenticeship of observation, which may be more influential than pre-service teacher education on teaching practices (Davin et al., 2018). In the present research, the teachers all reported learning languages in traditional, grammar-oriented ways and, to a certain extent, a structural view of language and language learning was visible in their practices and the syllabi they designed, with the exception of Giulia. All the teachers, except Giulia, had attended similar university programmes, with a strong emphasis on literature and little pedagogical training. This "literary" approach to language teaching, focusing on teaching literature at the expense of language (and therefore of listening), and guided by a structural approach to language learning, appeared to be common amongst these teachers and has indeed been observed by other commentators in the Italian context (Di Martino and Di Sabato, 2014). Teachers drew legitimacy for their beliefs in such an approach from the fact that it was culturally and collectively recognised as viable. It is also interesting that by participating in this research, some of the teacher participants went through moments of cognitive dissonance, "a recognition of contradictions in their teaching context" (Golombek and Johnson, 2004, p. 323), questioning their rationales for "how" they taught listening and the extent to which contextual factors were externally enforced rather than self-imposed constraints.

10.1.2.3   Beliefs about learners

All the teachers in this research expressed strong beliefs about learners, a finding in line with previous research showing how accumulated experience of what works with learners plays a central role in the belief systems of

experienced teachers (Borg, S., 2011). In particular, this research unveiled a common cluster of beliefs regarding the importance of preserving the emotional wellbeing of learners. These beliefs were very influential in these teachers' work, as they saw it as their role to enact practices aimed at guaranteeing the learners' emotional wellbeing during listening activities. The strongest influence of these beliefs was observed in Maria's classes: in the absence of any strong contrasting beliefs or contextual constraints, she enacted practices aimed at making her learners feel safe, shielding them from failure and boosting their self-concept – showing similar practices to those displayed by teachers in Graham et al. (2014).

Listening is acknowledged to be a potentially difficult and anxiety-inducing activity in the literature (Chow et al., 2018). Further, learners' self-concept, which is closely connected to listening anxiety (Liu, 2016), might be especially low in a skill such as listening, which is ephemeral and unobservable (Graham, 2017). Consequently, teachers may decide to simplify listening task demands to shield learners from negative emotional experiences that may affect their self-concept. This study shows that the degree of task simplification may correspond to the extent to which teachers believe in the importance of the emotional impact of listening activities on learners. Figure 10.3 describes the relationship between these beliefs and the practice of simplifying listening:
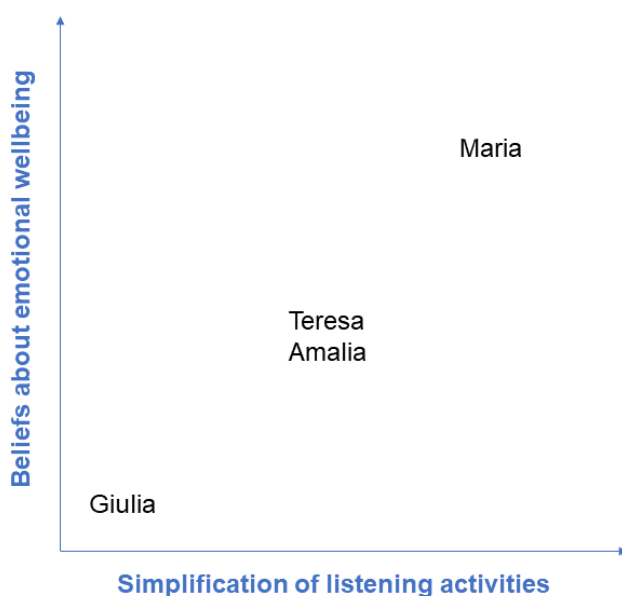

Figure 10.3: Relationship between beliefs about emotional wellbeing and simplification of listening activities

Based on the findings in this study, beliefs about learners' emotions had virtually no impact on Giulia (who, as discussed above, was more influenced by

her general beliefs about education). Conversely, they were very influential in Maria's case, as she simplified tasks to prevent her learners from experiencing failure. In Amalia and Teresa's cases, however, while playing an important role in their belief systems, concerns about preserving the learners' emotional wellbeing were sometimes superseded by other beliefs. For instance, while believing that learners should be helped to feel calm in class as a requisite for successful listening, Teresa also strongly believed that challenging them with difficult tasks was necessary. She reconciled this apparent tension between beliefs by exposing learners to difficult content while continuously engaging with their comprehension and supporting them. Overall, this study shows how beliefs about learners' emotional wellbeing (including listening anxiety and self-concept) may be strong influences on the teaching practices of experienced teachers and be more powerful influences than other beliefs or contextual factors.

This is also partially reflected in the general education literature and in some language education studies. First, that a concern with the emotional wellbeing of students plays an important role in teachers' belief systems is shown by studies such as Rosiek (2003). In his US-based ten-year longitudinal study of teacher practical knowledge, he reported that teachers consistently enacted "emotional scaffolding" in an attempt to either foster constructive emotions or reduce unconstructive emotions in school pupils. Based on findings from Ekornes (2017), it is especially female school teachers who seem to perceive a responsibility regarding learners' negative emotions. Furthermore, in their study of Australian primary and secondary school teachers, Willis et al. (2019) found that female teachers above 40 who taught in state schools were more likely to perceive strong tensions between concerns with student wellbeing and academic improvements, reflecting the findings from the present research.

Having established that student emotions appear to be a concern for teachers, an ensuing question may be the extent to which this concern is justified. This appears to depend on how such beliefs in the importance of student emotional wellbeing are enacted in classroom practice. In their meta-analysis, Lei et al. (2018) found that teacher support in school correlated with positive learner emotions. Similarly, Mainhard et al. (2018) showed that teacher agency, especially when the teacher was perceived to be punishing or anxious, was a key predictor of learner anxiety. More specifically in the language education field, Dewaele et al. (2017) studied pupils taking foreign languages in UK secondary schools. They found that positive teacher behaviours, such as praising students for good performance and using humour well, correlated with higher student enjoyment of foreign languages but not necessarily to lower

foreign language classroom anxiety. Consequently, they advise that "teachers should strive to boost [foreign language enjoyment] rather than worry too much about students' [foreign language classroom anxiety]" (p. 1). Furthermore, if beliefs about the importance of emotional wellbeing push teachers into simplifying task demands, as was the case with Maria in this study and several of the respondents in Graham et al. (2014), it is worth wondering whether this may only tackle anxiety momentarily, but not equip learners with the necessary cognitive, metacognitive and socioaffective strategies they need to succeed in listening outside of school. This is true especially if, as was the case with Giulia's learners, a certain amount of challenge and subsequent anxiety can encourage learners to develop listening strategies to cope with classroom activities – though the question remains of what an "optimal" level of anxiety may be (Brown et al., 2001). Another dimension to consider is how teachers' inclination to protect students and lower task demands may inadvertently affect students' self-beliefs, especially attributions. As discussed in Chapter 3, praise following success at easy tasks can unintentionally convey low-ability cue to students (Graham and Taylor, 2014) and holding lower expectations of students perceived to be less capable can lead teachers to deal with them less optimistically, affecting the students' self-concept and motivation (Dewey, 2004).

10.1.2.4   Beliefs about listening

The teachers' beliefs about listening were limited in terms of their influence on practice and of the depth in which they were articulated. As acknowledged by some teachers in their interviews, a general tendency existed to take it for granted that listening was important in language teaching; however, "how to teach it" was a neglected aspect.

A key theme about which all teachers held beliefs was listening difficulties. All the teachers concurred that listening had the potential to be difficult, pointing to the role of vocabulary, speed and accents in hindering learners' comprehension. These are not uncommon beliefs among EFL teachers and learners, as shown in the investigation of teachers' and learners' beliefs about listening difficulties in Wang, L. and Fan (2015). However, while it is known that vocabulary can be a predictor of listening performance, speed of delivery does not consistently impact listening comprehension across learners. It is also unclear if, when referring to "speed" as a hindrance, learners might be at least partially referring to features of spontaneous speech (Révész and Brunfaut, 2013). Regarding accents, they appear to hinder comprehension especially when the listener has had limited exposure to them and finds them unfamiliar

(Field, 2019). As discussed in the Conclusion chapter, this study provides further evidence that these conceptions are widespread and may benefit from further exploration, as teachers may look at listening difficulties as external, uncontrollable factors on which their instruction can have no effect, potentially reinforcing learners' existing maladaptive attributions. This may even be communicated explicitly to learners by teachers, for instance by telling them that specific accents or speakers make a video more challenging.

The teachers also claimed that learners should be encouraged not to worry if they did not understand everything. This reflects a general tendency, encouraged by Communicative Language Teaching and filtered through textbooks, to focus on top-down listening processing and the use of schemata to compensate for inevitable gaps in understanding (Cauldwell, 2018). Indeed, like the teachers in Santos and Graham (2018) and Karimi and Nazari (2017), the participants in this research did also appear to recognise the difficulties caused by bottom-up decoding in listening. However, these were never the focus of specific exercises, confirming a potential lack of awareness of or interest in bottom-up decoding activities in listening instruction.

Table 10.1 summarises some of the main beliefs about listening and listening instruction held by teachers in this research, highlighting how the teachers appeared to hold some opposite beliefs:

Table 10.1: Teachers' beliefs about listening

Pre-listening	Pre-listening activities are useful (Maria, Amalia)	Pre-listening activities should either be brief or not be conducted at all (Giulia, Teresa)
Prior knowledge	The activation of prior linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge before listening can be useful to learners as they can use it compensate during listening (Maria, Teresa, Amalia)	Prior knowledge should not be activated before listening as learners will overuse it to compensate for gaps in comprehension and fail to pay attention (Giulia)
Vocabulary and grammar in listening	It is useful to pre-determine vocabulary and grammar points for students to notice in listening texts (Maria, Amalia)	Work on vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation should be emergent and only come after the listening (Giulia, Teresa)
Purpose of listening activities	Listening texts should be harnessed mainly for language analysis (Maria, Amalia)	Listening is primarily aimed at covering non strictly linguistic content (Giulia, Teresa)

This table again reveals the split between teachers who favoured a more structured and structural approach, and those who followed a more emergent and content-driven approach to teaching. Maria and Amalia's cases also

confirm previous findings from Wang, L. and Renandya (2012) regarding the perceived high importance of pre-listening activities.

The weight of these beliefs about listening within the teachers' belief systems, however, was not significant. Firstly, most of these beliefs were the by-products of, or explained in conjunction with, other stronger beliefs: for instance, beliefs about the importance of vocabulary in listening were linked to broader core beliefs about vocabulary being the key to language learning. This supports Green's (1971) claim that primary and derivative beliefs may exist, whereby derivative beliefs are based on primary beliefs. Secondly, although researchers might wish to investigate specific aspects of educational practices, teachers may not have reflected on such issues in any depth and thus, when asked about them, they may struggle to consciously articulate their beliefs about them. In this study, listening in itself was not a topic on which teachers appeared to have reflected deeply. As a result, some of the teachers' beliefs were rather uncritical reflections of the rationales behind textbooks and exams (as Amalia consciously acknowledged). For instance, a common belief (and a common structure of listening activities in textbooks) was that listening for gist should be followed by listening for details; however, teachers never articulated why that may be. Third, beliefs about listening were frequently superseded by more core beliefs when tensions arose, for example with beliefs about issues that had higher educational value for teachers.

In summary, the beliefs about listening held by the teachers in this study were related to learners' difficulties, the usefulness of pre-listening activities and the purposes of listening instruction. References to listening processes and how these may be developed in the classroom were scarce, with the exception of bottom-up difficulties (which, however, were never elaborated on in any depth). This highlights the chasm between "good" listening instruction as conceptualised in the academic literature (predominantly as process listening) and how listening may be conceptualised in mainstream school environments such as the one in this study, as subservient to other purposes and part of a broader interdisciplinary educational approach.

10.2 Learners' beliefs and practices

This section discusses the learners' beliefs and practices, in response to Research Questions 3 and 4:

3. What are the beliefs held by learners in an Italian secondary school about listening in English as a foreign language?
4. What are their listening practices?

The discussion revolves around two overarching themes in the research: the role of listening tasks and the perceived unpredictability of listening.

10.2.1   The role of listening task types

The types of listening tasks with which learners are faced play a key role in influencing students' beliefs, practices and performances. In analyses of the role played by tasks in influencing students' listening performance, tasks have been analysed from the perspectives of their text input (e.g. lexical complexity), task procedures (how the task is implemented), and format and length of the required response (e.g. multiple choice versus open-ended questions) (Brunfaut and Révész, 2015). As Vandergrift (2007) argues, however, it might be difficult to isolate how specific components of a task impact on overall task difficulty, especially since the difficulty of a task is likely to be the result of an interaction between task characteristics and listener characteristics – and indeed, based on the findings from this research, it may not be merely the task that influences how learners approach listening, but also what they believe and feel. In other words, it appears as if learners hold beliefs and feel emotions related to listening tasks, which can be closely linked to their classroom experiences.

Various studies have utilised the metacognitive knowledge framework (Goh, 2008) to investigate how listener-related aspects contribute to listening comprehension. This framework includes three components: person knowledge (including self-concept and self-beliefs), task knowledge (knowledge of the processes and skills involved in listening, the factors impinging on it and ways to improve) and strategy knowledge. The learner beliefs analysed in the present study overlap with aspects of metacognitive knowledge: self-concept and attributions would thus be part of "person knowledge", beliefs about difficulties and anxiety would be part of task knowledge and reported strategies of strategy knowledge. Studies investigating these three components have stressed the importance of person knowledge in particular in explaining differences in listening proficiency (e.g. Wang, Y. and Treffers-Daller, 2017; Vandergrift and Baker, 2015). The present research confirms the importance of person knowledge dimensions such as positive self-concept, which appeared to be more typical of learners who felt in control when faced with the unpredictability of listening; however, what this study also highlights is the relative importance of task-related beliefs (i.e. the task viewed from the learners' eyes rather than only as objective task-related factors) in influencing how students approach listening tasks. Four main themes emerged that were connected to learners' beliefs about listening tasks: purposes, difficulties, anxiety and reported strategy use.

Figure 10.4: Themes related to listening tasks

10.2.1.1   Beliefs about the purposes of listening tasks

Regarding the perceived purposes of different listening activities, findings from this study support the notion that learners may have "hidden agendas", or beliefs about the objectives of classroom activities, which, "as much as the teacher's objectives, determine what learners take from any given lesson" (Nunan, 1989, p. 176). These beliefs influenced how learners approached listening tasks, at times causing some "unnatural" listening behaviour: for example, when learners held strong beliefs that the listening was meant to be for vocabulary and that new vocabulary would be the subject of upcoming tests, they reported listening out for this vocabulary. Learners who did listening activities aimed at extracting vocabulary and grammar more frequently saw listening not only as a way to enhance their abilities in communication, but also to improve their vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation.

While there is nothing intrinsically wrong with any of these beliefs, the concerns raised by Yeldham (2018) apply to these findings too, as students that hold such beliefs may focus disproportionately on understanding words or identifying grammar structures at the expense of general comprehension. This is particularly important considering that less skilled listeners often rely more on bottom-up decoding to begin with, "depriv[ing] themselves of the opportunity to compensate for lack of linguistic knowledge through the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies" (Stæhr, 2009, p. 581). It is also important to note that lexical difficulties arise not simply when learners do not know words in a text, but also (as reported by some learners in the present research) when they

struggle to recognise known words or when they overfocus on known words – especially when pre-taught before listening – at the expense of general comprehension. Further, as we will see below, these learners' beliefs about the purposes of the listening tasks were influenced by their teachers, though – crucially – they did not always correspond to their teachers' intended purposes for listening tasks.

10.2.1.2   Beliefs about listening difficulties

Learners also held beliefs about their main listening difficulties and how these related to different listening tasks. Many of the student participants showed that they had thought about listening and about themselves in relation to listening. This was shown, for example, by their awareness of what it was plausible to expect from their listening (i.e. not understanding everything).

Generally, when asking learners what is difficult about listening, their most likely answers will point to words, speed of delivery or "accents". This is partially corroborated by research, which shows that features of the input, especially in terms of vocabulary, can influence the difficulty of a listening activity Findings appear to be mixed as far as speed of delivery is concerned (Brunfaut and Révész, 2015). Since this research was based on an analysis of the learners' beliefs about listening, it is also worth noting that a gap may exist between the difficulty of a text measured by objective means, such as lexical density or words per minute, and its difficulty as perceived by learners. In their comparative analysis of these two factors, Révész and Brunfaut (2013) reported strong relationships between objective measures of lexical complexity and learners' perceptions of lexical complexity in listening tasks. However, learners also perceived more difficult tasks as being associated with higher speed of delivery and more difficult pronunciation, organisation of ideas, and grammar even when these characteristics had no objectively measurable impact on listening difficulty.

This suggests that students may not always be the best judges of the difficulty of a text, especially when their beliefs are left unchallenged or unaddressed in the classroom (Ferris, 1998). The students in this research showed some limitations regarding their beliefs about their listening difficulties: for example, they seemed to perceive some of the difficulties posed by connected speech (speakers "garbling their words") but could not quite put a name to them. These findings echo the accounts of some secondary school teachers in Graham et al. (2014), who claimed that whenever they tried to engage learners in post-listening reflection on their difficulties, students were not wholly capable of explaining them. Further, when listening is for learning language, students may

overestimate the importance of some variables, such as grammar structures, to their overall listening comprehension, whereas these structures may only be important insofar as the purpose of the listening is to notice and learn to use them. Students may also hold misconceptions regarding what a native speaker is (e.g. students viewing Nigerian speakers as non-native speakers in this study) and regard specific "accents" as automatically more difficult to understand.

Holding misleading or underdeveloped beliefs about listening difficulties might be particularly detrimental to students who also have low listening self-concept (such as almost one third of the students surveyed in this research, who reported not being able to complete most classroom listening activities). Low self-concept students may have low motivational maintenance (Dörnyei and Ottó, 1998) and fail to persevere in the face of difficulty (Graham, 2006). Although their attributional styles appeared complex, students with reported low self-concept tended to blame their failures on task difficulty, luck and a general lack of ability, in line with previous findings from research investigating attributions (e.g. Hsieh and Kang, 2010). Further, when interviewed straight after a lesson, students referred with more conviction to speaker and input variables as key hindrances regardless of their levels of self-concept. As is discussed further in Chapter 11, developing a more thorough understanding of the factors causing difficulty in listening may be helpful in providing students with a framework on how to manage their difficulties, monitor their progress and feel more in control of their listening.

10.2.1.3   Listening anxiety

Tasks were also a key factor associated with perceived listening anxiety: both high and low self-concept students interviewed reported experiencing listening anxiety regarding the same task types. This suggests that listening anxiety, generally described as a skill-specific type of anxiety (Zhang, X., 2013), might also vary with different tasks. Students with both high and low self-concept expressed anxiety regarding the same tasks, but the real difference between the two groups appeared to be their perceived ability to manage the unpredictability of the listening tasks (a crucial theme that is discussed in the next section), as this ability was higher in students with positive self-concept.

The findings from the present research also confirm another arguably underdeveloped and contextual aspect of listening anxiety, that is, the extent to which students believe that classroom listening implies or is connected to being assessed. Although in classroom listening the stakes may not be as high as in exam settings, the growth of high stakes examinations in schools has led

increasing numbers of school-age students to suffer from test anxiety (Bodas and Ollendick, 2005). In the Italian context, this shift towards increased testing is reflected in the recent introduction of standardised tests at all school levels (Pagani and Pastori, 2016), but also the ever-increasing uptake of English proficiency exams, such as FCE and IELTS, for school-age pupils. Teachers seem to be highly influenced by these exams in how they plan learning objectives and learning activities, especially since proficiency exams are calibrated on CEFR levels, which are also important reference points in the Italian system and in textbooks.

Test-anxious behaviour is normally "evoked when a person believes that their intellectual, motivational, and social capabilities are taxed or exceeded by demands stemming from the test or evaluative situation" (Zeidner, 2014, p. 269). Test anxiety thus does not appear to arise only with formal examinations, but may stem from any situations that the test-anxious learner perceives as evaluative, generating task-irrelevant thoughts that deprive the learner of the attentional resources needed to complete the task at hand – with task-irrelevant thoughts arising especially in students with negative self-beliefs (Wong, 2008). In the present research, one key factor that seemed to make learners more or less anxious, even about the very same task, was the extent to which they perceived it as being connected to a testing or evaluative dimension. Thus, Giulia's students were all faced with some degree of anxiety because they constantly felt that they were being assessed. Conversely, tasks with similar characteristics, such as those used by Maria and Amalia (consisting of graded input from the textbook, with gist followed by detail questions and no apparent connections to evaluation), could be perceived differently by different students, as low self-concept students who associated the classroom task to future tests reported feeling more anxious. This finding contributes to addressing the issue of how different factors may contribute to and exacerbate listening anxiety. This was acknowledged in studies such as Chang (2008), showing that testing was the main source of listening anxiety for students. Learners' beliefs that classroom listening tasks are subject to teachers' assessment or are connected to future tests may thus be conducive to listening anxiety. However, what also ought to be considered is whether these beliefs correspond to the teacher's intentions – and as we will see in part 10.3, this may not necessarily be the case.

10.2.1.4   The influence of listening tasks on reported listening strategies

Different tasks appear to have a bearing not only on the formation of learners' beliefs, but also on the strategies that they report using to deal with them. As mentioned above and in Chapter 3, the difficulty of a listening task can be determined by a number of factors, including text variables (e.g. lexical complexity), format and length of the task response (e.g. multiple choice items) and listener characteristics (e.g. anxiety or concentration). The tasks observed in this research were not analysed quantitatively based on these parameters. They can however be grouped by some broad common characteristics: while some tasks were more structured, with set numbers of replays and a clear aim from the outset (e.g. answering questions), others were more emergent in nature, with learners listening or watching for general comprehension, independently and with questions being asked only after listening. The more structured approaches to listening instruction appeared to lead students to employ strategies in more "scholastic" (as described by the learners themselves in sections 5.9.6 and 8.8.3) and fixed ways. This implied strategies such as devoting attention to pre-listening preparation – a metacognitive strategy commonly associated with less proficient listener in Chen, A.-H. (2009) – or using selective attention to focus on specific words or sounds to find the answer to comprehension questions. Conversely, with more unstructured tasks, students appeared to orchestrate different strategies more flexibly, possibly benefiting them more in their listening development. The ability to combine strategies, use them flexibly and deploy them based on the listening situation is indeed an acknowledged goal of listening instruction. In fact, listening strategy research has suggested that listeners follow idiosyncratic paths in their strategy development (Graham and Macaro, 2008) and that it is not so much the quantity of the strategies used that makes for more effective listening, but their selection and combination to solve listening problems (Yeldham and Gruba, 2014).

These findings also cast doubt on the extent to which the strategies that students develop based on different classroom tasks are transferrable to real life situations, which require the orchestration and adaptation of several strategies to tackle many more diversified listening situations (including multidirectional listening) than students may have to deal with in the classroom. This is especially the case if classroom listening activities are simplified. This issue highlights an often overlooked aspect of listening strategy research, that is, the fact that any discussion of strategies ought to consider task types and

task demands, as this is what gives rise to the use of strategies (Graham et al., 2008). This is particularly important if teachers are unaware of the task types that students find difficult: in Wang, L. and Fan (2015), for example, a comparison of perceived difficulties among students found that the most striking difference was precisely related to task variables. When asked to rate the difficulty of blank-filling and multiple-choice tasks, the two groups held completely opposite views. Accounting for tasks and task demands is also important if, like Giulia, teachers hold the belief that task format has no impact on listening comprehension or performance on listening tests. This belief is contradicted by findings from studies such as Brindley and Slatyer (2002) and Berne (1993), showing that task format does impact listening performance in tests. This suggests that, especially in high stakes tests, learners might want to be prepared for specific task types in tests.

10.2.2   The unpredictability of listening

It is not uncommon in the literature to see claims that learners regard listening as one of the most challenging language skills and that they feel they lack control over it due to its transient nature (Xu, 2018). The students in this research did not regard listening as the most difficult skill. This stands in contrast to previous findings related to Italian school-age students, such as Serraggiotto (2012), which have led to the assumption that listening is the skill perceived as most difficult by students. Arguably due to the high level of language proficiency in Italian *licei*, as well as the students' reportedly frequent exposure to listening outside of school, this was not the case in this study. Furthermore, while acknowledging their difficulties, students generally also regarded developing English listening as important. They also appeared to welcome the challenge and the opportunity to come into contact with real-life English – a type of language some of them seemed to distinguish from the more "scholastic" version to which they were exposed in school. This echoes the results of Santipolo's (2016) survey of secondary school students in Italy, in which the majority stressed the value of using authentic materials and using the language, which they found "fun and stimulating", for communication.

While not regarding the skill as the most difficult, students still acknowledged the difficulties involved in listening, though with the limitations we discussed above regarding their ability to elaborate on them. Rather than pointing to the transient nature of listening input, however, learners more consistently referred to the "unpredictability" of listening. In the following sections, I outline how learners conceived of this unpredictability and how they responded to it.

10.2.2.1   Understanding learners' beliefs about the unpredictability of listening

As shown in previous research, students often lament that listening texts are "too fast" or include too many unknown words (Renandya and Farrell, 2010). In her widely-cited research about school students' beliefs about listening, Graham (2006) also reported that students felt helpless and passive towards listening. She claimed that teachers should help learners feel more in control of their listening through strategy instruction. Based on the results from my study, we can further characterise listening as "unpredictable", a belief that may be held particularly by students in school because of specific contextual factors.

Classroom listening tasks were fairly routinised and each class described the main types of listening activities in similar ways. It could thus be argued that this may have made listening more predictable and it partially did: as mentioned, students appeared to have learned to use specific strategies to handle specific task demands that they knew were coming. However, because the listening tasks and materials were always teacher-sourced, variables such as topics, English varieties and task types were decided by the teacher, contributing to the feeling that listening was unpredictable. As reported by one student in Giulia's case, "for all [he] knew, it could have been a listening on crocodiles or whatever". This belief may be exacerbated if pedagogical practices are teacher-centred, providing little space for negotiating the syllabus and for students contributing materials and setting their own goals. Although schools vary, several studies have suggested that teacher-centred instruction is not uncommon in Italian education (Macaro et al., 2019; Nes et al., 2018; Carena and Moran, 2011), to the extent that the introduction of CLIL in secondary schools has been regarded as "a clear break from teacher-centred lecturing towards learner-centred ways of learning […], in response to one of the greatest challenges currently faced by Italian schools" (Cinganotto, 2016, p. 384).

Another factor that may exacerbate a feeling of unpredictability related to listening is the influence on learners of instructional practices the experience in other school subjects. Indeed, various learners referred to how they could not study or prepare for listening as they could with most other subjects or other aspects of language learning. This view may at least partially be due to how they perceived listening as being assessed to some extent, but it may also be influenced by the prevalent types of instructional and assessment practices in school more at large. As Brown, A.V. (2009) claims in his analysis of learners' beliefs about effective language teaching, a fruitful approach to investigate the formation and impact of learner beliefs ought to take into account students' full

educational experiences, including other disciplines – in other words, their all-round apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975). The expectation that one could study or prepare for listening may stem from being used to a direct transmission teaching model, including having set "boundaries" to what is to be learned, and, in the case of listening in particular, from having extensive pre-listening activities – which, it should be noted, are hardly ever part of listening in real life. This view of listening as unpredictable and an activity for which one cannot prepare becomes problematic if learners believe they do not have the tools to face this unpredictability: as I discuss in the next section, learners can respond differently to this belief and their responses seem to impact how successful they report being.

10.2.2.2   Learners' responses to the unpredictability of listening

The findings from this research show four main types of responses to the perceived unpredictability of listening:

1. Anxiety and helplessness
2. Tackling the task through strategic listening behaviour
3. Tackling the task through natural ability
4. Adjusting one's expectations

The first type of response was characteristic of students with lower self-concept. This echoes the points made by Schunk and Pajares (2005) that students who perceive themselves as less capable may not be aware of what tools to employ to control and enhance their listening comprehension. Conversely, learners with higher self-concept believed that they could somehow handle the unpredictability of listening, either through the use of strategies or more effortlessly, while less self-confident learners saw themselves as prey to the unpredictability.

In terms of the second type of response, applying strategies, some research reports that higher self-concept corresponds to better application of strategies (Graham, 2007; Yang, 1999). However, the findings from this research show that this relationship may not always be as straightforward but vary based on the level of autonomy in listening achieved by learners. The difference between high and low self-concept students in this study did not consistently correspond to wider reported use of strategies: in fact, some high self-concept students reported using comparatively few strategies, while reportedly succeeding at listening consistently and effortlessly (i.e. employing the third response listed above). This suggests that some learners may already be at a partially autonomous stage in their listening development and therefore report using

fewer compensatory strategies. In other words, there is no simple correspondence between the number of strategies that students report using and their listening development. This also emphasises a point made by Graham et al. (2008). In their longitudinal qualitative investigation of strategy use, they highlight the potential of case study methodology in examining the highly individualised and task-based nature of strategy use and the limitations of "counting" strategies to identify better listeners.

Another interesting finding is that strategies may develop in learners regardless of receiving explicit strategy instruction, lending some support to Yeldham (2009). As mentioned, the one element that all the cases had in common was the absence of process-based instruction, reflecting findings in Graham et al. (2011). This study was conducted with learners of the same age as the learners in the present research and it showed that the students' strategic development was not linked to their teachers' approach to listening instruction. Further, learners believed that improvements in their listening comprehension were mostly due to their overall improvement in linguistic knowledge. However, the findings from the present study suggest that learners may be able to see that they are developing apt listening strategies and appreciate their contribution to their overall listening development.

The most reported strategy in this research was inferencing. Inferencing, that is, filling in missing information and guessing meaning of words (Goh, 2002), is used differently by higher and lower level listeners, as the former appear to use it more skilfully and successfully, while the latter may fall back on it simply to overcome limitations in linguistic knowledge (Fung and Macaro, 2019). Inferencing was reported in this study by students of all levels of self-concept and reported success in listening comprehension. However, the self-described more successful students seemed to employ it with higher levels of awareness, control and planning than the other students interviewed. Indeed, less successful students may have reported using inferencing as the only means to "stay afloat" in the sea of the stream of speech, as linguistic knowledge can greatly constrain the effectiveness of strategy use. Learners with lower linguistic knowledge may thus have used inferencing in a more unprincipled manner, perhaps more as "guessing" than as part of skilful orchestration of strategies, as posited in Graham et al. (2010). Such orchestration of strategies appeared to be a conscious effort by some learners, while some others seemed to rely on their ability more effortlessly – which is not to say they did not employ strategies, but they simply may have become more automatised.

Finally, having acknowledged the challenges posed by listening as unpredictable, higher self-concept learners employed a fourth mechanism to manage the unpredictability of listening, i.e. reflecting on and accepting their limits. They showed realistic expectations of themselves: knowing that they could not possibly understand everything, they behaved accordingly, focusing on understanding the general meaning and using compensatory strategies such as inferencing especially when faced with more difficult tasks. The importance of learners having realistic expectations about listening lends support to the theory of self-regulation in listening. The information processing theory of self-regulated learning, elaborated by Winne (2001) and applied to listening strategies by Oxford (2017), posits that learners should go through four phases when approaching tasks: task definition (i.e. understanding the task); goal setting and planning; strategy enactment and metacognitive adaptation. In the process of understanding tasks and setting goals, students who have realistic expectations about what they can achieve are more likely not only to be more effective at goal setting and planning, but also to know about and apply strategies better.

10.3 Teachers' and learners' beliefs and practices: relationships

This study set out to investigate the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices and learners' beliefs and practices, aiming to answer Research Questions, 5, 5a and 5b:

5. What is the relationship between the teachers' practices and explanations and the learners' beliefs and practices?

5a.   To what extent are they aligned?

5b.   What are the implications of this alignment?

This section discusses these interrelations and their implications for teaching and learning.

10.3.1   The alignment of teachers' and learners' beliefs

The findings from this study showed that teachers and learners held beliefs that were mostly aligned, though instances of divergence were also detected. A first important point should be made however regarding how this alignment is defined. Indeed, the results can be compared with the existing literature only to an extent, as most other studies (e.g. Valeo and Spada, 2016; Hawkey, 2006 in Italian schools) have conceptualised teacher-learner alignment in terms of

similarity of belief statements, often elicited by administering two versions of the same questionnaire to teachers and students. Whereas several of the studies that employed this definition reported that teachers and learners hold rather different beliefs, this was only partially the case in this study. One explanation for this could be that perspectives were more likely to be aligned in my study because each teacher was matched to their own learners. On a broader level, however, comparisons can only be limited in scope since, similar to Barcelos (2003), the present research conceptualised alignment and misalignment as mutual influences of teachers and learners, as they each interpreted the other's practices and underlying beliefs, rather than statements on pre-determined topics. This study did not pre-determine items or sub-topics on which the two sets of beliefs were to be compared, adopting a more emergent approach in recognition of the fact that people interpret activities focusing on aspects that make sense to them and neglecting those that do not (Woods, 2003).

Given the topic of this research, the only direct comparison that may be sensible is between the findings in the present research and the study conducted in China by Wang, L. and Fan (2015) – the only one to date that compared teachers' and learners' perceptions of listening difficulties. Overall, the key issues identified were similar in the two studies, with both teachers and learners pointing at text and processing variables as key difficulties. As I explain below, my teacher participants interpreted their learners' difficulties. Echoing finding from in Wang, L. and Fan (2015), they sometimes overestimated the emotional difficulties given by listening, which were not confirmed by the learners interviewed. Another important element of teacher/learner divergence observed in some of the cases and in the Chinese study was related to task variables, as Giulia in particular underestimated the impact of the types of questions in listening tasks, an aspect that was regarded as important by learners.

Aside from this perspective on the alignment and misalignment of teachers' and learners' beliefs on listening difficulties, the present study also contributes to our understanding of the mutual influences of teachers and learners in the classroom. On the one hand, learners interpreted classroom activities and what they believed was their rationale; on the other hand, teachers also held beliefs about their learners' beliefs and practices. What follows is a discussion of these mutual interactions, while section 10.3.2.2 examines the implications of such interactions.

10.3.1.1 The influence of classroom activities on learners' beliefs

As mentioned, learners interpreted their teachers' practices and their underlying rationales. They did so mostly with regards to three themes: the purposes of listening, the varieties of English used and the usefulness of materials and activities. For the most part, the learners' beliefs were in line with the teachers' beliefs and rationales for activities. That learners' beliefs can approximate those of their teachers appears contextually plausible considering that tenured school teachers spend approximately five years teaching a group in Italian secondary schools. This gives students time to become accustomed to and potentially internalise the teaching practices of their teachers, as studies on the apprenticeship of observation show (see Vinogradova and Ross, 2019; Moodie, 2016; Westrick and Morris, 2016). Further, as Riley (2009) found in his analysis of shifts in teachers' and learners' beliefs over time, learners' beliefs can change in the direction of teachers' beliefs.

Looking at the social nature of the classroom from a social constructivist perspective, the formation of learners' beliefs can be considered a type of learning, as learners constantly observe and interpret the events taking place in the classroom (Ellis, 2008; Barcelos, 2000). Woods (2003) argues that learners' beliefs influence such interpretations and ultimately the actions they take with regards to their learning. Further, as shown in Figure 10.5, he claims that learners' interpretations of classroom events are directly influenced by three factors: their beliefs about how teaching and learning should occur (i.e. their value judgments), the relationship between classroom activities and real life (termed "authenticity"), and cultural norms.
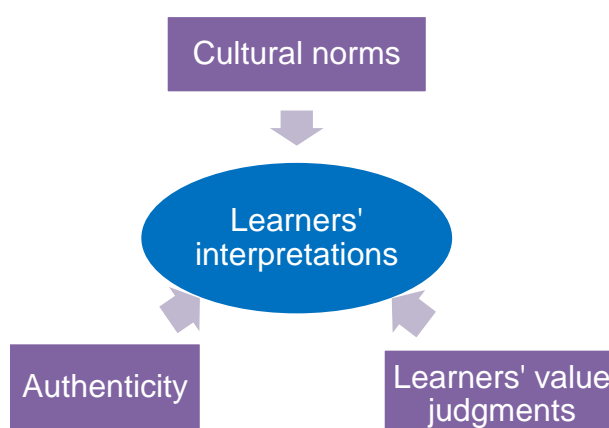

Figure 10.5: Influences on learners' interpretations according to Woods (2003)

This model can also explain the sources of the learners' interpretations in this study. First, learners held some beliefs about how learning and teaching should occur. Such value judgments, also investigated under the guise of "folk linguistics" in Italian schools (Santipolo, 2016), were evident in beliefs about the importance of vocabulary in language learning or of listening to "real English". Indeed, this understanding of authentic, real-life uses of English and its distance from classroom practice was also a belief that several students reported (i.e. "school English" being different from "real English"). They frequently pointed to past, present and hypothesised future instances of communication in which understanding spoken English was deemed important. Finally, examples of what can be termed "cultural" norms can be detected in Giulia's students' belief that they needed to use different words from the listening text when answering questions – a practice that is extremely widespread in the culture of school education in Italian *licei* and which learners were used to in other subjects*.*

Classroom activities and teaching practices thus seem to influence the learners' beliefs, both when the teacher's rationale is evident (i.e. self-evident or explicitly stated) and when it is inferred by students. At times, students in this research seemed to have worked out the rationale of the activities by themselves, apparently without any explicit statement from the teacher (e.g. Amalia's students saw a key purpose of listening as learning vocabulary, as did their teacher). Other times, teachers seemed to have been more explicit in expressing their beliefs underlying the rationales for listening activities (e.g. playing the listening text again because the American accent made it more difficult). At times, these appeared to have been internalised by students: a clear example of this was Giulia's interviewees, who agreed with their teacher that textbooks were of limited use to language learning.

Whether faced with teachers' beliefs being overtly stated or inferred from classroom activities, students appeared to reflect on and develop their own theories on their teachers' intentions – a process of interpretation and potential misinterpretation whose importance has been emphasised, among others, by Kumaravadivelu (1991). Teachers' intentions, whether explicit or implicit, may be especially important for those students who perceive listening activities as being tied to assessment, as may be common in school contexts. Based on findings in the present study, this was true not only when learners' interpretations were aligned to their teachers', but also in cases in which learners understood activities differently from how teachers intended them: for instance, a learner strongly believed that listening was mostly for teaching grammar points that her teacher had pre-determined, despite her teacher being adamant that content was her priority and emergent grammar was only a

secondary aim. Given the assessment pressures felt by learners in some cases, identifying the underlying objectives of listening activities besides listening practice (e.g. learning vocabulary that would be object of forthcoming tests) was seen as a priority to succeed at tests.

Overall, in light of the strength of the conviction learners showed when reporting such beliefs, as well as the apparent thought they had given them, Woods' (2003) argument may be taken one step further, as learners' beliefs do not just influence how they interpret classroom activities, but they also themselves originate from the interpretation of classroom activities; hence, based on the findings of this study, such interpretations may in fact become beliefs in their own right.

10.3.1.2 The influence of learners on teachers' beliefs

The teachers held beliefs about their learners' listening difficulties, self-concept (both general and listening-specific), emotions and listening practices outside of school, as discussed in section 10.1.2.3. In some cases, these beliefs were reflected in the learner data: for instance, the teachers "correctly" identified most of the difficulties reported as most common by their learners. Other times, their beliefs were not wholly reflected in the learners' reported beliefs and practices: for example, while they may have believed that their learners were subject to listening anxiety, their learners' interviews did not always reveal this to be a key problem.

Holding beliefs about students' practices and beliefs also comes from a continuous process of interpreting classroom events and learners' behaviour (Freeman, 1996), as shown previously by studies such as Phipps and Borg (2009) and Barcelos (2000). It is also worth noting how, in articulating their beliefs about learners' beliefs, practices and emotions, teachers tended to generalise these beliefs with reference to learners more broadly, rather than specific learners. A possible explanation for this is that being experienced teachers, they related what they saw in videos during VSR interviews to their broader beliefs and conceptions about teaching and learning, as experienced teachers may be better able to do (van Es and Sherin, 2002). As is discussed in the following section, beliefs about learners overrode other beliefs and contextual influences in given situations.

10.3.2 The implications of teacher/learner beliefs alignment and misalignment

Having established that learners and teachers can influence each other in the formation of beliefs, displaying both alignment and misalignment, this research also endeavoured to investigate the implications of this in terms of impact on teachers and on learners. In some cases, these mutual influences impacted what teachers and learners did more clearly, while other times, they only had limited impact.

10.3.2.1 Impact on teachers

Regarding the impact on teachers, the influence of learners on teachers' beliefs and their teaching has arguably been overlooked in comparative studies of students and teachers (Wan et al., 2011), but emerged in this study. As discussed in 10.1.2.3, a key belief about learners that seemed to impact teaching practices was related to emotions and self-concept as being conducive to learning. With the exception of one teacher participant, beliefs about the learners' difficulties, emotions and self-concept were key explanations for their practices and often superseded other kinds of beliefs, for instance about contextual factors. Accumulated experience of what works with learners is a key source of experienced teachers' beliefs and a driver of their work (Levin, 2015). However, this study shows that within this wealth of experience, the experience of and beliefs about *how learners feel* may also be particularly important to how teachers make sense of their work – perhaps even more so when lacking solid pedagogical training based on the evidence presented here. Indeed, the only case (Giulia's) in which a teacher had more pedagogical training, solid theories about teaching and learning and did not hold core beliefs about the importance of emotional wellbeing, beliefs about the learners' difficulties were not major explanations of her practices.

These findings speak more broadly to the issue of the weight that different beliefs may carry in belief systems, with core beliefs exerting a stronger influence than peripheral beliefs (Green, 1971). While beliefs about learners' beliefs, practices and emotions were influential in some instances, their influence ought to be regarded in the context of intricate networks of competing beliefs. In this study, beliefs about emotional wellbeing superseded other beliefs and considerations about teaching and learning when tensions emerged, confirming Phipps and Borg's (2009) hypothesis that teachers may subordinate their beliefs about effective teaching and learning to their learners' expectations and motivational needs. This also corroborates Woods' (2003) observation that

teachers feel they can play a role in influencing learners' affective states, seen as an enabling strategy to enhance learning. Nevertheless, beliefs about learners were only influential when they did not clash with other stronger beliefs or contextual factors.

Beliefs about learners were also experientially ingrained. This supports the notion that with experience, teachers

> *develop more coherent, concrete representations of students. Organization of beliefs about learners moves from superficial categorization to categorization driven by experience, complexity, and comprehensiveness resulting in a greater understanding of types of student. (Lavigne, 2010, p. 105)*

Based on extensive experience spanning over decades, these beliefs seemed to typify learners, as teachers often referred to learners in general, which might also explain why these beliefs did not correspond entirely to learners' reports.

The teachers characterised by a concern for emotional wellbeing acted on these beliefs in their classroom practices; however, sometimes their understandings of anxiety as a key difficulty or low self-concept as a problem were not reflected in students' accounts. Given that these beliefs were influential, leading even to the simplification of listening activities, teachers might benefit from actively seeking to access their learners' actual beliefs and check how aligned they may be to their interpretations (Wan et al., 2011). This is an issue of great pedagogical importance, as teachers' actions may be guided by influential beliefs that are in fact misinterpretations and are not checked against learners' real beliefs, emotions and practices. As I discuss in Chapter 11, post-listening activities may be an especially appropriate space to conduct such work.

10.3.2.2 Impact on learners

In terms of the impact of teacher/student belief alignment and misalignment on learners, previous research has claimed that considerable misalignment can have consequences on teaching and learning, such as tensions (Bloom, 2007), reduced learners' willingness to participate in classroom activities (Sadeghi and Abdi, 2015), learner resistance to teaching innovations (Jing, 2006) and misinterpretation of teachers' messages and intentions (Wan et al., 2011).

In terms of how such alignment or misalignment impacted how learners approached listening, there was no simple univocal correlation. Some learners seemed to interpret the purposes of listening activities differently from how their teachers intended them, yet this did not seem to impact their approach to listening negatively; conversely, other students correctly understood the

purposes of listening as learning vocabulary (which would later be tested) so they listened out for it. Despite correctly understanding the purpose of the activity (signalling alignment with the teacher), this belief could potentially detract attention from grasping meaning and encourage unproductive listening behaviours. Furthermore, while learner beliefs (and learners' interpretations of classroom activities) may negatively impact how learners approach tasks, learners' beliefs should be viewed less as intrinsically positive or negative, and more in terms of how appropriate and productive they may be in relation to specific learning contexts and purposes (Mercer, 2011). A clear example of this is the role of listening anxiety, widely viewed as detrimental to listening comprehension in the literature (Chow et al., 2018). In Giulia's case, both high and low self-concept learners seemed to have developed appropriate strategies to deal with listening anxiety, which although unsettling, they considered part and parcel of listening. This addition to their listening abilities may not just be useful as it is transferrable to real-life situations, but it may also contribute to more realistic beliefs and expectations about listening as a whole. Arguably then, the conditions created by Giulia in her classroom allowed for anxiety to work as a motivator for the development of strategies, showing the limitations of generalisations about the impact of learner beliefs on learning.

10.3.3 Teachers' and learners' reciprocal interpretations: a framework

In conclusion, the interrelations between learners' and teachers' beliefs and practices in this research are summarised diagrammatically in Figure 10.6, showing how teachers and learners interpreted each other's beliefs, emotions and practices, and how this ultimately influenced or did not influence them.

Interpret learners' beliefs, emotions and practices

Correctly

Incorrectly

Impact on practices

Teachers

Limited impact on practices

Learners

Impact on practices

Limited impact on practices

Interpret classroom activities and underlying rationales
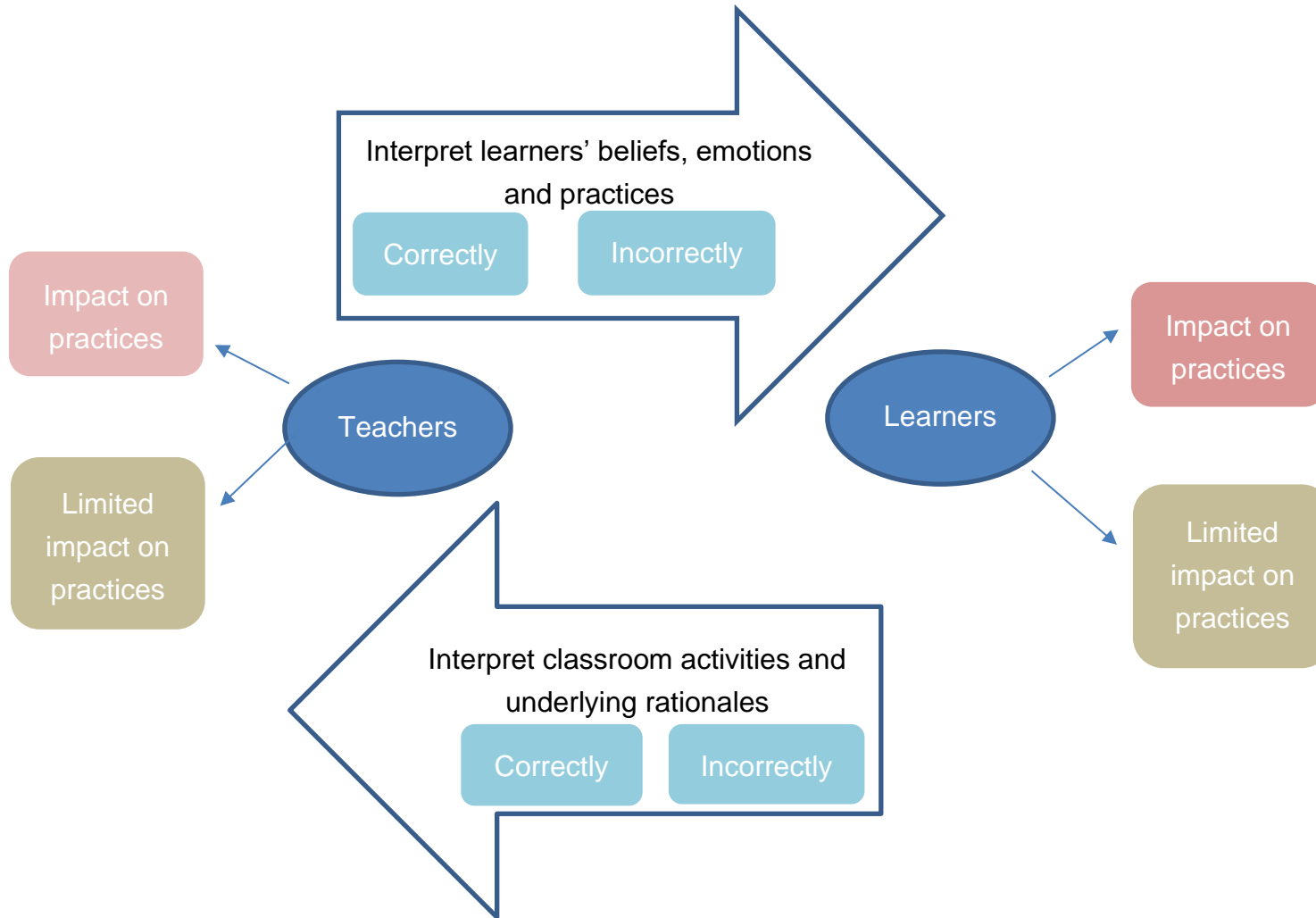
Correctly

Incorrectly

Figure 10.6: Interrelations between teachers' and learners' beliefs

10.4 Limitations

To conclude my discussion, I outline the main limitations of this study. First, the study relied predominantly on self-report data, which are removed from the actual behaviours and beliefs of people (Cohen et al., 2007). This issue was addressed by triangulating self-reports with observational and document-based data. Further, classroom observation may have caused some reactivity in participants – i.e. the Hawthorne Effect – leading them to behave in uncharacteristic ways and detracting from the trustworthiness of the data (Diaper, 1990). While this is somewhat inevitable, I discussed with the teachers how comfortable they were with being observed and filmed and asked them to consult with their learners too. Accommodations were made for those who were more hesitant by only recording audio initially. Participants may also have responded in socially desirable ways. I attempted to overcome this by clarifying to students that their answers would be kept confidential and participation in the project was free. I also built professional and personal relationships with the teachers, which may have helped them be honest in their answers.

Another limitation related to data collection methods stemmed from the use of learner questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire was necessary to collect data from all the student participants, as given the high number, interviews would not have been feasible. While questionnaire data were helpful to detect general trends in beliefs and identify volunteers for subsequent interviews, the data from some of the questions were of limited depth. For example, on the theme of attributions, high self-concept students were not asked to explain reasons for their failures and, conversely, low self-concept students were not asked to explain their successes. By only analysing questionnaire data, high self-concept students might have appeared as being guided almost exclusively by adaptive attributions, and vice versa. However, interviews delved into both experiences of successes and failures with all learners: especially in the second round of learner interviews, listening activities that the learners had just concluded were discussed and the analysis of these data revealed far more complex attributional styles. As a broader point, it should also be noted that despite acknowledging the complex, fluctuating and situated nature of learner beliefs on a theoretical level, the study focused more on the teacher data; hence, learners' beliefs were not captured in all their complexity.

In terms of the participants, the sample of teachers was rather small, hence no claims to statistical generalisability can be made based on this study. However, analytical generalisability was pursued and the thick description of the cases enhanced the study's transferability, whereby the reader is given evidence to

determine how the findings may be applicable to other contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). While the participants were not meant to be representative of teachers and learners in other contexts, similarities are likely to exist within the Italian school context that may have useful pedagogical implications (see next chapter).

Finally, the topic of the research likely also created some limitations. As noted by Siegel (2014b), research on listening can be challenging due to its ephemeral nature and, I would contend, because it is a skill which teachers and learners do not think about in its own right. As a result, specific questions about listening may have posed a challenge for respondents who may have never thought about these issues in any depth. Further, when using the VSR method, teachers may have felt forced to elaborate a rationale for their classroom practices even when they were simply following the textbook or acting without a specific logic in mind. These methodological challenges in stimulated recall methods have long been noted (Borg, S., 2006) and in this study, whenever teachers seemed to struggle to elaborate a rationale or referred to the textbook, I did not insist further and I reported their observations faithfully in the data.

Chapter 11 Conclusion

In this chapter, I examine how the findings from this study contribute to theory in the areas of teacher and learner beliefs, and listening pedagogy. I then outline the key pedagogical implications for teaching and learning, and pre-service and in-service language teacher education. Finally, I suggest some directions for future research.

11.1 Implications for theory

The present study contributes to theorisation in the fields of teacher and learner beliefs and listening pedagogy, as discussed in the next sub-sections.

11.1.1 Implications for teacher and learner beliefs

Firstly, the need for a more nuanced understanding of "context" emerges in the study of teacher and learner beliefs. Context is being recognised more and more as crucial in the study of language teacher cognition (Burns et al., 2015), professional development (Aliaga-Salas and Ončevska Ager, 2020) and learner beliefs (Kalaja et al., 2018). However, as Sanchez and Borg (2014) claim, differences may exist between contextual factors as external influences on teachers and the teachers' beliefs about such factors. The findings from the present research suggest that what teachers identify as inevitable constraints on their work may not always be actual constraints directly impacting their practice. Rather, contextual factors such as the need to teach literature or prepare students for Cambridge exams were internalised and collectively understood as influences by the teachers in this research. This also shines a light on the importance of studying collective beliefs, an under-researched topic in language education (Borg, S., 2019). Investigating collective beliefs may illuminate how and why contextual factors come to be perceived collectively as constraints.

Furthermore, researchers have argued that discrepancies between beliefs and practice may stem from the existence of opposing beliefs within belief systems and from context mediating teachers' beliefs (e.g. Graham et al., 2014). The present research supports the existence of belief systems (with some beliefs being core and other peripheral). It also highlights the issues of freedom and accountability in teachers' work, on which few studies in teacher cognition research focus explicitly. Indeed, teachers often explain their practices by claiming that they "must" do certain things due to external contextual factors. However, as the findings from this study suggests, this may not always be the case: not only are some factors not externally enforced constraints, but the

degree to which teachers are held accountable and given freedom in their decisions is also likely to be an important consideration when investigating how beliefs may interact with contextual factors in teachers' belief systems.

Another contribution of this study relates to the emotional side of teaching. Teacher emotions have increasingly been acknowledged as crucial to understanding how teachers make sense of their work and are now an important research strand in language teacher cognition (Golombek, 2015) and applied linguistics (Dewaele, 2019). While teacher emotions are being investigated, what seems to be lacking is perhaps research on language teachers' beliefs about learners' emotions. This type of concern, which emerged as a core belief cluster for some of the participants in this research, is likely to be significant in school contexts, in Italy and beyond, as emotional fluctuations and emotional intensity are very typical of adolescent learners (Pinter, 2016). This also marks a difference between investigating school environments and private schools or universities. Theories and constructs from applied linguistics and language education (e.g. "process-oriented listening"), often elaborated without reference to school-level contexts, can prove inadequate to understand the dynamics of schools. Unlike tertiary or commercial contexts, teaching the language (or, more specifically, teaching listening) in schools may only be a relatively small part of a teacher's job and it seems unlikely that school teachers will conform to common knowledge in the ELT academic community. Conversely, they are more likely to frame their work in broader educational terms, with emotional wellbeing, enhancing study skills, preparing for tests or nurturing global citizenship possibly being more prominent concerns. Moving forward, it would thus be advisable to integrate a general educational perspective and a focus on teachers' beliefs about learners' emotions into investigations of English language teachers in schools.

Finally, this study expands our understanding of teachers' and students' mutual influences in the classroom. Most studies investigating both simultaneously have compared belief statements on a set of topics, revealing instances of convergence and divergence. A necessity that emerged from this research is that of researching how teachers and learners interpret each other's beliefs and practices, how these interpretations and misinterpretations contribute to the formation of beliefs and how they influence learning. Not only do school teachers appear to be influenced by their beliefs about learners (though these may not always correspond to learners' claims), but learners also seem to interpret their understanding of teachers' pedagogical rationales. The fact that students and teachers are somewhat implicitly influenced by such dynamics

also leads to the question of whether this is conducive to learning (as discussed below).

11.1.2   Implications for listening pedagogy

This study has important implications for listening pedagogy and for its implementation at school level. Possibly the most widely repeated claim in studies concerning listening pedagogy in language education is that listening follows a Comprehension Approach (Field, 2008), focusing on the production of correct answers rather than the development of listening processes. A lack of process instruction was certainly detected in this study. However, how listening was taught and conceptualised was more characterised by another common element: the view of listening as part of a broader pedagogical approach and subservient to other skills, systems or non-linguistic purposes. Firstly, this shows that the view of listening as aimed at extracting vocabulary or grammar structures, deemed obsolete in some academic literature, may actually still be widespread. Field (2008, p. 21) claims that "[t]he practice of replaying a listening passage in order to reinforce recently taught grammar has been abandoned, along with other structuralist notions". However, while textbook materials may have evolved along these lines, teachers' own structural views of language teaching and lack of listening-specific pedagogical knowledge may explain why they still use listening materials for grammar and vocabulary.

Limited familiarity with innovations in listening pedagogy may also represent a barrier to the introduction of process-oriented listening instruction. Although recommendations about developing the processes of listening are valid (and explored in more detail below), there seems to be a gap between what is academically sound and what is contextually feasible, especially when teachers' beliefs are factored into the equation. Indeed, introducing process-oriented instruction carries with it a degree of technicality that may clash not only with teachers' limited familiarity with best practices in the literature, but also with how they see their roles as all-round educators. In schools, listening seems likely to be viewed more holistically than technically, as everything is subordinate to the education of the human being (rather than just the language learner) and far more emotionally charged than with university or private language school teaching. In Italian schools in particular, language teaching is also linked to teaching culture and literature, and it is increasingly seen as interdisciplinary due to the emergence of CLIL and Project-based learning (Cinganotto, 2016). As a result, listening pedagogy in this context may be better described with reference to these aspects than merely using the Comprehension Approach label. Further, adopting more contextualised and observation-based descriptive

labels for listening pedagogy in different environments is likely to help bridge the research-practice gap. On a practical level, this poses challenges to understanding and implementing of process-based instruction, as discussed in the next section.

11.2 Implications for practice

The present study is one of few that have collected empirical observational evidence on how listening is taught. It has shown that listening is primarily conceived of and taught as something subordinate to other issues; further, it has shown a general lack of process-based instruction, particularly in the post-listening phase. I have emphasised that any methodological innovation needs to co-exist with local understandings of listening and beliefs about education. With this in mind, some recommendations can be made that may be valuable for teaching practices and teacher education programmes.

11.2.1   Engaging with learners' difficulties

Listening may not be a topic on which many teachers and learners reflect and it is a comparatively under-researched skill (although the last decade has seen an increase in studies of listening). However, there is one topic that has both been relatively widely investigated and on which teachers and students hold beliefs: listening difficulties.

Based on this study, learners showed an awareness of certain difficulties, with some students showing they had given this some thought and deliberately employed strategies to tackle difficulties. Awareness of these difficulties was however somewhat limited, with two points being common among learners:

a. they had begun to perceive certain problems (e.g. connected speech) but could not put a name to them or they held misleading beliefs about them;
b. they concurred that accents, vocabulary and speed were among the key difficulties.

Teachers rarely engaged with their learners' difficulties explicitly. Teresa was the only teacher who once asked her learners to tell her about their difficulties in a post-listening phase. One obvious implication of this approach, and of the findings at large, is that listening-specific pedagogical knowledge appears to be limited in teachers. Consequently, in any plans that future Italian governments may set in motion for pre-service teacher education programmes (currently on hold), an important area to develop ought to be listening pedagogy. As indicated above, ideally this would be done in a contextually relevant way. This will be valuable especially as listening comprehension is set to gain even more

importance in Italian language education. In this context, writing, reading and grammar have traditionally been at the centre of teaching and testing. However, the forthcoming national rollout of compulsory INVALSI exams and the PISA 2025 Foreign Language Assessment (OECD, 2020) will both include listening tests.

In terms of teaching practice and potential for in-service teacher development, two areas may be worthy of attention to use post-listening activities productively and harness learners' difficulties: metacognitive discussions and attribution retraining. First, through metacognitive discussions facilitated by teachers, learners may be supported in identifying what difficulties they encounter, what they do while listening and what strategies they may apply to improve, giving them more control over what they perceive as a largely unpredictable activity. A fruitful approach would include conducting listening activities with learners and offering feedback so that they can analyse their listening breakdowns and what strategies were successful and unsuccessful. As Cross (2010) reported, an increase in metacognitive awareness can be achieved through relatively simple activities such as peer discussion about difficulties and strategies, making metacognitive discussion easier to incorporate into existing teaching practices.

This type of work, building on the results of studies such as Graham (2007), may also incorporate an attribution retraining element. Attribution retraining aims at helping learners see the role of insufficient effort or use of ineffective strategies in determining their failures rather than inability or task difficulty (Brophy, 1998). Such interventions have yielded positive results in general educational studies (Hilt, 2004). As Erten (2015) claims, attribution retraining studies in the field of language learning are still scarce: however, listening appears to be a potential useful focus for such work given how unpredictable it feels to learners.

11.2.2   Evaluating beliefs

It seems clear from this research that teachers and learners interpret each other's beliefs and practices in the classroom. Learners seem receptive to teachers' beliefs and rationales for activities. A consequent issue arises, however, when they internalise beliefs that may not be entirely conducive to learning. In the case of listening, examples of this would be an excessive emphasis on testing (i.e. "getting answers right") or on extracting vocabulary. A question that also arises is whether teachers may inadvertently reinforce maladaptive attributions, for example by claiming that a certain listening activity is more difficult because of a specific accent. This influence of teachers on

learners can be the source of reflection and action, possibly in in-service professional development. As Siegel (2014a) notes, teachers can be guided to self-examine and reflect on their beliefs, how these are communicated to learners and what research findings exist on listening.

In addition, as evidence exists that teachers misinterpret learners' beliefs, practices and emotions, teachers could be encouraged to collect data from their learners about this. This study showed that school teachers may be particularly concerned about maintaining learners' emotional wellbeing. However, learners did not always point to anxiety being an issue for them, and in fact some of them seemed to have used anxiety productively to develop a set of dedicated strategies to manage it. This brings into question two practices that were observed in this study and in previous research, which appear to be fairly widespread: the simplification of listening activities and the use of long pre-listening activities. Commentators such as Field (2008) and Goh (2010) have argued that pre-listening activities tend to over-extend in the language classroom, leaving little time for actual listening or post-listening activities. The idea of preparing students as much as possible is in line with findings from Graham et al. (2014), as teachers try to limit the unpredictability of listening as much as possible. This approach can be exacerbated if teachers are also trying to "protect" students' emotions. However, not only is the usefulness of certain pre-listening activities still debated, but simplifying listening risks creating unrealistic expectations for students and it might not equip them with the tools they need to cope with listening in real life. It would thus be beneficial for teachers to re-evaluate their beliefs and practices around these issues.

One related dimension on which teachers might elicit their learners' beliefs relates to the sources of listening materials used in class. An awareness emerged in this study among learners who perceived the English they heard in textbooks as "scholastic" and "artificial", as opposed to the more natural English they heard outside of class. Considering that learners seemed motivated by accessing "real-life" English and that all the materials in the classes were teacher-sourced (potentially contributing to the feeling of unpredictability), teachers might consider encouraging learners to source their own authentic materials (White, 2006). This might bring topics that are relevant to students into the classroom, potentially helping them tackle the difficulties maintaining concentration that they experience with unknown and uninteresting topics. It might also bridge the gap between school tasks and real-life English, as findings suggest that learners who do simplified listening tasks may have different levels of self-concept for classroom and real-life listening.

Teachers might also benefit from considering their own beliefs about contextual factors. An interesting consequence of this research was that during interviews, some teachers gradually appeared to realise not only that they "took listening for granted", but also that some of the contextual factors that they regarded as inevitable constraints on their work (e.g. teaching the literature) were in fact more collective understandings that had become self-imposed constraints. Teachers might therefore analyse how their work is influenced by these factors individually and collectively, and how they could be approached differently.

Finally, as listening is set to gain more importance in Italy through the INVALSI and PISA 2025 Foreign Language Assessment (OECD, 2020), some beliefs related to assessing listening may also merit further investigation by teachers. The first is whether the format of an exam has a bearing on performance in that exam and whether it is worth practising specific formats in preparation. The second is whether such practice without an element of metacognitive reflection is enough, as post-listening activities could focus much more effectively on identifying difficulties and appropriate strategies.

11.3 Directions for future research

Based on the findings from this study, future research may examine the following issues:

- How do learner and teacher beliefs impact listening development?
- How do teachers' and students' mutual interpretations and misinterpretations impact student learning and/or listening development?
- How is listening conceptualised and taught in other school contexts? Does the contextual factor/influence/constraint distinction apply in other contexts?
- How are teachers' beliefs formed collectively and reinforced tacitly through common practices? Where do these beliefs originate? To what extent are teachers aware of them?
- Given the high degree of freedom characterising schools and teachers in Italy, practices are likely to vary substantially across schools and contexts. The school where the present study took place was in an affluent area; it employed almost exclusively tenured teachers, frequently hosted research projects and implemented programmes such as the Flipped Classroom, IGCSE and CLIL. This likely influenced the outcome of the research. It would therefore be worth replicating this study in schools where these factors may not apply, such as schools in less

affluent areas or vocational schools, where other more contextual concerns may be more pressing.

11.4 Closing remarks

It has been argued that listening is the "Cinderella skill" (Mendelsohn, 1994), having been traditionally overlooked it research. However, in the last two decades, we have witnessed an encouraging increase in research on this skill. Field's (2008) influential work has popularised the need to move toward more process-based instruction and applications of procedures such as strategy instruction or bottom-up listening have been investigated (see Yeldham, 2016; Siegel, 2015).

If we turn to the question of whether this approach has permeated to classroom practice, however, we see that its uptake has been relatively limited. For all its merits, process-based instruction is unlikely to positively influence mainstream teaching without more insights into how teachers conceive of listening and listening instruction, and how process-based procedures may fit into their ways of understanding listening.

This research has suggested a chasm exists between process-oriented conceptualisations of listening in the academic ELT community and beliefs that may be more common among school teachers, viewing listening as part of a broader educational approach. Attempts to disseminate and introduce process-based instruction will thus benefit from being integrated with such local understandings. On the other hand, teachers may also benefit from being exposed to process-based techniques and re-evaluate their existing beliefs – as Amalia stated, considering "the how" when teaching listening.

These considerations guided my first attempt at dissemination in a workshop I held with the teacher participants of this research in October 2019. The workshop started from an examination of the teachers' beliefs about listening and the preliminary findings about their learners' beliefs. It then moved onto a discussion of potential process-based activities to integrate with their existing teaching approaches. Together, we worked on listening activities that may be useful for developing critical thinking and interdisciplinary projects. Further, we discussed how to weave elements of process-based instruction (e.g. implementing post-listening metacognitive discussions or strategies such as making and checking predictions) into their existing practices.

This sort of non-academic dissemination is going to be crucial to my work on the impact of this research. English language teachers and schools in Italy are the main constituency that may benefit from my findings. Aside from my plans

for academic dissemination (which I have started, as detailed in Appendix 15), I shall first produce a report on this project that will be shared in the Italian *Avanguardie Educative* schools. Further, in collaboration with a fellow listening researcher, I have recently submitted a proposal for a practical book aimed at school language teachers, which will cover several of the areas I investigated in my research. Finally, my findings will feed into a proposal for an Erasmus+ project involving seven partners across six countries, including four secondary schools. Over thirty language teachers will participate in training activities focusing on developing listening through an integrated approach and the use of an app for practising bottom-up listening.

Finally, it is worth considering how learners view listening. A common assumption has been that learners find listening difficult and unenjoyable (Graham, 2017; Xu, 2018). Based on this study, this was not necessarily the case, as learners were keen to practise listening and did so also outside of school, using a range of authentic materials that were relevant to their interests. What did emerge, however, was that school learners face some listening difficulties that teachers are in a position to address, such as those related to the tasks associated with listening comprehension. Further, the finding that learners view listening as unpredictable suggest that it would be advisable to find new ways to develop listening strategies to give them a sense of control over their listening. This will be especially productive as we harness the increasing availability and flexibility of listening materials that learners can genuinely enjoy both in and outside of the classroom.

Appendix 1 Teacher information sheet

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Teachers' and learners' beliefs on listening
in English as a foreign language: A multiple case study in Italian secondary
schools

Date approved: 17/05/2018; Ethical Approval Number: AREA 17-135

Principal investigator: Chiara Bruzzano

Contact details: edcb@leeds.ac.uk / +39 3459322559

Supervisors: Dr Gary Chambers, g.n.chambers@education.leeds.ac.uk; Dr Simon Borg,
g.n.chambers@education.leeds.ac.uk

You have been invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide if you want to
participate, it is important that you understand the purposes of the study and what we will ask
you to do. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with
others if you wish. Ask me any questions you may have if something is unclear or you would
like more information.

What are the purposes and background of the project?

Listening in English as a foreign language is often reported as a difficult skill to teach and learn.
With this study, we wish to find out more about the views of teachers and students in Italian
upper secondary schools about listening in English. We will conduct the study in your school
from October 2018 to May 2019.

Who is doing this research?

The project is led by Chiara Bruzzano, a doctoral researcher in Language Education at the
University of Leeds, UK, and supervised by Gary Chambers and Simon Borg, professors at the
University of Leeds.

Why have I been chosen?

We have chosen you because we are recruiting teachers of state *liceo* schools with at least
twenty years of experience.

What will I have to do during the research project?

Your participation in all research activities will be scheduled based on times convenient for
you. You will select a third- or fourth-year class to work with on this project. In October, you
will need to allow fifteen minutes during a lesson for your students to fill out an anonymous
questionnaire. You will then be asked to select four lessons throughout the research period
during which you will teach listening. Ms Bruzzano will observe these four lessons without

intervening or disrupting them in any way. She will audio record the lessons and, based on your consent and the students', she may film them. Consent to video recording is subject to ongoing negotiations and can be interrupted at any time. Ms Bruzzano would also like to interview you four times and ask you about your opinions on teaching and on listening. The interviews will last 30 to 60 minutes on average, subject to your availability. In two of the interviews, you will be given some audio or video excerpts from your classes as stimuli to talk about your teaching. Finally, you will be asked to provide copies of materials used in class, listening tests and English syllabi.

Do I have to participate?

You are free to decide if you want to participate or not.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of taking part?

Your participation will allow us to better understand how to learn and teach listening in English. You will have a chance to reflect on your teaching and gain a new perspective on your learners' views. You will also have the opportunity to join a final workshop with all the teachers participating in the study. The workshop will be based on the preliminary findings from the research and will hopefully aid you in developing your skills in teaching listening and reflecting on your current views and teaching practice. There are no particular risks or disadvantages for you in this research.

What will happen to the results of the research?

We may publish the results of this research in articles on international scientific journals and use them in presentations at conferences. Ms Bruzzano will use them to write her thesis. All data will be anonymised and you will not be identifiable.

Will the information obtained in the study be confidential?

The information that you give us, the audios and videos will be kept confidential and stored on secure servers of the University of Leeds. Your participation will be anonymous. If we write articles based on this research, you will not be personally identifiable. We may decide to quote your words in publications, but we will still guarantee your anonymity.

Can I withdraw from the study?

You can withdraw whenever you want without having to give an explanation. If you withdraw, the data that you provide will be deleted and no longer used in the study.

Who can I contact for further information?

You can contact Chiara Bruzzano at edcb@leeds.ac.uk or +39 3459322559.

Thank you for your time and attention!

Appendix 2 Learner consent form

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Consent to take part in the study "Teachers' and learners' beliefs on listening in English as a foreign language: A multiple case study in Italian secondary schools"

Please tick the boxes to give your consent:

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project. ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and has no impact on my school grades or any other aspect of my school life. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without any negative consequences. In addition, if I do not want to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. If I withdraw from the study after having filled out a questionnaire, I understand that the data will still be used by the research team in an anonymous form. If I withdraw after participating in interviews and observations, I understand that the data provided by me will be deleted and not used by the research team. ☐

I give permission for members of the research team to access my anonymous responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research. I understand that my responses will be kept confidential. ☐

I understand that the researchers may use my words in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form. ☐

I agree to take part in the following activities:

- Questionnaire ☐

- Classroom observation ☐

- Individual interview ☐

I understand that if I participate in interviews, I will be audio recorded and if I participate in classroom observations, I will be filmed and audio recorded. ☐

Participants' name: _____
Signature: _____
Date: _____

Researcher's name: _____
Signature: _____
Date: _____

Appendix 3 Ethical approval

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Chiara Bruzzano
School of Education
University of Leeds
Leeds, LS2 9JT

ESSL, Environment and LUBS (AREA) Faculty Research Ethics Committee
University of Leeds

17 May 2018

Dear Chiara

Title of study:	**Teachers' and learners' beliefs about listening in English as a foreign language: A multiple case study in Italian secondary schools**
Ethics reference:	**AREA 17-135**

I am pleased to inform you that the above research application has been reviewed by the ESSL, Environment and LUBS (AREA) Faculty Research Ethics Committee and following receipt of your response to the Committee's initial comments I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion as of the date of this letter. The following documentation was considered:

Document	Version	Date
AREA 17-135 Ethical Review Form_Chiara Bruzzano_Amended.docx	2	01/05/18
AREA 17-135 Committee Provisional + CB.doc	1	114/05/18

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the information in your ethics application as submitted at date of this approval as all changes must receive ethical approval prior to implementation. The amendment form is available at http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/EthicsAmendment.

Please note: You are expected to keep a record of all your approved documentation and other documents relating to the study, including any risk assessments. This should be kept in your study file, which should be readily available for audit purposes. You will be given a two week notice period if your project is to be audited. There is a checklist listing examples of documents to be kept which is available at http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/EthicsAudits.

We welcome feedback on your experience of the ethical review process and suggestions for improvement. Please email any comments to ResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely

Jennifer Blaikie
Senior Research Ethics Administrator, the Secretariat
On behalf of Dr Kahryn Hughes, Chair, AREA Faculty Research Ethics Committee

CC: Student's supervisor(s)

Appendix 4 Questionnaire

In this questionnaire, we want to find out more about your opinions on listening in English. By "listening" we mean listening to and understanding spoken English (at school, in a conversation, on TV, etc.)

Please read all the questions carefully and answer them. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers.

Gender

Female ☐

Male ☐

Class

3rd year ☐

4th year ☐

1. How **difficult** is it for you to listen, read, speak and write in English? Tick the box that applies to you.

	Not at all difficult	A little difficult	Not difficult nor easy	Quite difficult	Very difficult
Listening					
Reading					
Speaking					
Writing					

2. How much **do you like** listening, reading, speaking and writing in English? Tick the box that applies to you.

	Dislike very much	Mostly dislike	Neither like nor dislike	Mostly like	Like very much
Listening					
Reading					
Speaking					
Writing					

3. In your opinion, how **important** is it to learn to listen, read, speak and write in English? Tick the box that applies to you.

	Not at all important	A little important	Quite important	Very important
Listening				
Reading				
Speaking				
Writing				

4. Can you explain the reasons for your answer on the importance of **listening** in the previous question?

_____

_____

_____

5. How **successful** do you feel that you are in the four skills in school? Tick the box that applies to you.

	Not successful at all	Not very successful	Average	Quite successful	Very successful
Listening					
Reading					
Speaking					
Writing					

6. Which one of the following two statements describes you the best? Tick ✔ the option that best describes you.

a. Most of the time I manage to complete listening tasks in school ☐

b. Most of the time I struggle to complete listening tasks in school ☐

7. Could you explain the **reasons** for your answer to the previous question?

_____

_____

_____

8. How **often** are these activities done in your English classes? Tick your answer.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Listening to songs					
Watching videos					
Watching movies					
Listening to a recording from the book					
Listening to the teacher					
Listening tests					

9. How often do you **watch or listen** to materials in English (like videos, music, TV, etc.) in your **free time** (when you are not studying or doing homework)? Tick your answer.

Very often ☐

Often ☐

Sometimes ☐

Rarely ☐

Never ☐

10. If you do watch or listen to materials in English, **what** do you normally watch or listen to?

_____

_____

_____

11. In your life, what are the main **reasons** why you **watch or listen** to materials in English? Tick the boxes to express how important the following reasons are for you:

	Not important	Somewhat important	Very important
I want to live abroad			
I want to have conversations in English			
I want to improve my pronunciation			
I want to pass exams and tests			
I sometimes use English with my friends			
I think it will help me find a job			
I enjoy it			

12. Are there any other important reasons why you watch or listen to English?

_____

_____

_____

13. What are your **difficulties** when listening in English at school? Read the following statements and tick the option that applies to you.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. I find it difficult to understand the meaning of a long speech					
2. If there are complex grammatical structures, I find it harder to understand					
3. I struggle to understand topics I don't know well					
4. When there are words I don't know, I struggle to understand					
5. I find it more difficult to understand a spoken text when I'm not interested in its content					
6. When I do a listening exercise at school, multiple choice questions are easier to answer than gap-fill questions (where I have to insert words in blank spaces)					
7. When I do a listening exercise at school and I have to answer questions, I find it difficult to read comprehension questions in full if there is little time between questions					
8. When I do a listening exercise, I find it difficult to listen and write answers at the same time					
9. Listening and reading questions at the same time is difficult for					
10. I find it difficult to understand speakers with an accent that I don't know (for example American, Australian, Indian, etc.)					

Thank you for participating! Would you like to take part in a short interview on these topics? Add your name below:

Appendix 5 Observation sheet

Observation sheet

Date: ~~⊘~~ 1/4/2019 Time: 8:00 No. students: 21

Teacher: _____ Class duration: 50 min Obs. Number: 4

- English varieties: A) AE, African E (mixture of N/U, English & subtitles)
  B) AE

- Level of input: A) Authentic B) Authentic

- Equipment: IW A) youtube B) youtube

- Task type: A) comp PS B) comp. gS

- Learners' reactions: A) amused B) fairly interested

- No. of speakers: A) 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 3+ ☑
  B) ☑ ⊘

1

Minute	Notes
	INTRo: we're going back to the topic that we've been dealing with ... remember? Smth to do w languages?
	Ls - not particularly focused yet. Late Ls keep coming in late
	~~&~~ thn it ~~seys tst~~ lst hr of day
	S we were talking about?
	L - dying languages
	<u>lead - in</u> : remember we listened to interview + looked at data.
	Remember how many Ls are left in world?
	[I remember this was smth she was interested in]
	I thought we'd go back on it bc we're going to go back
	L to form your idea → L for reflection
	A)<u>pre-L - warm-up</u>
	T in your book on p. 72 we looked at languages that are either dying or dead .. T elicits dying languages from book

2

Appendix 6 Teacher background interview

A. Studies and background

A1 Can you tell me about your studies and qualifications? When and where did you get your degree?

A2 What were the main subjects?

A3 What training did you receive for teaching, both before and after starting to teach?

A4 (if no training) – why?

A5 How long have you taught English for?

A6 How did you start?

A7 For how long have you taught in this school?

A8 In what other schools have you taught before starting in this school?

B. Language learning experience

B1 For how long have you spoken English?

B2 Which foreign languages did you study in school/at university?

B3 As far as you can remember, how were foreign languages taught when you were in school?

B4 What differences can you see between how languages were taught when you were in school and how you teach English?

B5 What do you think are the reasons for these differences?

B6 Is there any aspect or skill of English that you struggle with more than others as a speaker (not a teacher)?

C. Context and students

C1 What do you think about the class you chose for this study? How long have you had them for?

C2 How much do they like English? On a scale from 1 to 10?

C3 How motivated are they? What are the main reasons why they want to learn English and understand English?

C4 What's their CEFR level? How satisfied are you with it? How confident are they?

C5 How many students are there in this class?

C6 What do you think about the number of students?

C7 Do you think your way of teaching is different in this class compared to other classes? If so, how?

C8 Can you briefly describe the English syllabus you follow?

C9 Who designed it?

C10 How often do you get a chance to talk about your work or collaborate with other English teachers in school? Do you find that this has an effect on your work? In what ways?

C11 Can you tell me about the role of the parents? What are their expectations about their kids' English learning? How does this influence your work, if at all?

C13 How often do your students take Cambridge or Trinity exams?

C14 What are the reasons why they do them?

C15 Does this influence what you do in class?

C16 What do you think about the new INVALSI test?

D. Teaching

D1 What is your favourite skill to teach? Why?

D2 What is your least favourite skill to teach? Why?

D3 About listening teaching, what materials do you normally use? Why?

D4 What listening tasks or exercises do you normally do?

D5 For you, what is the listening you do in classroom aimed at?

D6 In your opinion, do most students like or dislike listening? How come?

D7 What difficulties do they have with listening?

Appendix 7 Sample post-observation teacher interview

1. How happy are you with today's lesson? And with the listening section?

2. What were your lesson aims for today's class? Can you describe the main activities you'd planned?

3. Can you describe how you normally prepare your classes and your listening activities? How do you decide which parts to skip in the textbook listening exercises? (refer to textbook)

4. What did the students think of the listening part of the class? What do you think they struggled with? What do they normally struggle with?

5. What do you think about the accent from the listening? What English varieties do you normally use and why?

6. Does today's activity reflect the format of an exam?

7. What do you think about the textbook? What do you think about its listening activities? What do you look for in a textbook?

8. When you pre-teach some words before listening, how many words do they normally already know? How come you do this activity before listening?

9. How come you play the recording two or three times?

10. How are your listening tests structured generally?

11. What do you normally do when students don't understand something? How do you feel?

Extra questions:

_____
_____

Appendix 8 Extract from VSR schedule

Minute	Question
(intro)	In this lesson on Huawei, what were your aims? How did you choose this video? In your previous interviews we talked about the criterion for choosing video as being "linguistically comprehensible". How comprehensible was this video?
00.52-1.10	How come you get these two students to swap seats?
06.14-06.24	"obviously you're supposed to take notes about what we're going to see and hear" → can you comment on this?
17.52-19.09	"this table that you can see here is a...? This is Trump and this guy is…?" → did they know about this?
19.24-19.49	Here you asked about the journalist, not Huawei. How come?
21.57-22.10	"by the way I would like to remind you that your next classwork is going to be similar to this one, maybe not the same but the same level. Be careful" → why this reference here?

Appendix 9 Learner interview schedule

Introduction:

Thank you so much for being here. I will ask you a few questions about what you think and about your questionnaire answers on the topic of listening in English. Everything we discuss here will stay between us. If there's anything you don't understand, just let me know.

General questions

1. In general, do you like English? Why/why not?
2. When I say "listening" in the classroom, what kind of activity do you think of?

Questions on questionnaire

1. In question [1, 2 or 3] you answered that, compared to reading, writing and speaking, listening is difficult/enjoyable/important. Can you tell me why this is?
   a. Probe: what makes listening more/less difficult/enjoyable/important for you?
2. In question 2, you answered that you're (not) very successful at listening. Why do you think you're (not) very successful compared to the other three skills?
   a. Follow-up: (give learners cards with attributions to rank) Can you rank these reasons based on how much you identify with them? Can you tell me why?
3. How do you normally do at listening tests?
4. In question 8, you wrote that this activity is done often/rarely/never. Can you tell me how this activity is normally used in the classroom?
5. In question 9, you answered that you listen to English often/rarely. How come?
6. In question 13, I asked you what difficulties you have with listening and these are the ones you picked. Can you think of a time you had this specific [difficulty]? What were you listening to?
7. Do you ever use English outside of school? If so, for what?
8. Do you ever struggle to understand spoken English outside of school?

9. Is there any difference between the English you listen to in school and outside of school? If so, how could you describe this?

Extra questions:

1. In this questionnaire item, you wrote [unclear phrase]. Can you tell me what you meant?

Appendix 10 Empower

Pages 33-34 from Doff et al. (2015)

3 VOCABULARY
Ability and achievement

a Look at the adjectives in bold and answer questions 1–4.

And when you look at all the people who are **outstanding** at what they do …
… they seem so much more **talented** …
…that's what it takes to become really **skilled**.
Those who became **exceptional** practised about two thousand hours more …
… in order to learn something and become very **successful** at doing it, all you'll need is about 10,000 hours!
Without a doubt, there are people who are **brilliant** at certain things …
All the musicians in the study had the **potential** to become world famous

1 Which two adjectives describe a good level of ability?
2 Which adjective describes a good level of achievement?
3 Which three adjectives describe a very high level of ability or achievement?
4 Look at the noun in bold in the last sentence. Are the musicians world famous now or are they likely to be in the future?

b Write the noun forms of the adjectives.

1 skilled _____
2 talented _____
3 brilliant _____
4 able _____

c Complete the sentences with the words in the box.

at   for   to (x2)

1 He's very talented _____ playing the guitar.
2 He has lots of potential _____ succeed in his career.
3 She's got a real talent _____ drawing.
4 She definitely has the ability _____ become a brilliant actor.

d Think of an example of someone who:

1 is skilled at some kind of sport or art
2 has a talent for some kind of musical instrument
3 is famous and you think is brilliant
4 you think is exceptional in their field
5 is the most successful person you know.

e ☐ Tell each other about your answers in 3d. Give reasons for your opinions.

GIVE ME STRENGTH
A new word suggests a picture

Isn't it strange how we can remember the words of a much loved poem that we learnt at primary school more than twenty years ago, but we can't remember where we left our keys about ten minutes ago? More than 130 years ago this problem caught the attention of the German psychologist Herman Ebbinghaus and he came up with a theory: the strength of memory.

Ebbinghaus believed that if we find new information interesting, then it'll probably be more meaningful to us. This makes the information easier to learn and also helps the strength of memory. It also helps if we associate the new information with something else. For example, a new word we learn might make us think of a picture. This association can also build memory strength.

Using associations to help us remember what we learn is known as 'mnemonics'. For example, some people are able to remember a long sequence of numbers because the shape of all those numbers reminds them of a specific physical shape such as a guitar. Mnemonic techniques are often used by competitors in the World Memory Championships held each year in London.

Popular spelling mnemonics:
BECAUSE
Big Elephants Can't Always Use Small Exits
HERE or HEAR?
We hear with our ear.

A QUESTION OF TALENT?
"All you'll need is about 10,000 hours!"

We've all had the experience of trying to learn something new only to find out that we're not very good at it. We look around at other people we're learning with and they seem so much more talented and are doing so much better. It seems to come naturally to them. And when you look at all the people who are outstanding at what they do – the really famous people who are superstars – all you see is natural ability. The conclusion seems obvious: talented people must be born that way.

Without a doubt, there are people who are brilliant at certain things – they have a talent for kicking a football around a field, or they pick up a violin and immediately make music. However, there's also a lot to be said for practice. Psychologist K. Anders Ericsson studied students at Berlin's Academy of Music. He found that even though all the musicians in the study had the potential to become world famous, only some of them actually did. What made the difference? The answer is simple: time. Those who became exceptional were more competitive and practised about two thousand hours more than those who only did well. So, according to Ericsson, that's what it takes to become really skilled. It turns out that practice really does make perfect, and in order to learn something and become very successful at doing it, all you'll need is about 10,000 hours!

Fiona, chemist

Seamus, comic book writer

Henry, saxophonist

4 LISTENING

a ▶1.44 Listen to Seamus, Fiona and Henry talk about their learning experiences. Answer the questions.

1 Who talks about … ?
  a the best time to learn
  b learning hours
  c the strength of memory
2 Do the speakers think the learning ideas they talk about work for them?

b ▶1.44 Listen again and make notes about the things they talk about.

1 Seamus
  a copying comics
  b friends
  c graphic design

2 Fiona
  a chemistry
  b system for remembering symbols
  c colleagues' attitudes

3 Henry
  a tour preparation
  b daily learning routine
  c results

c 💬 Whose ideas do you think make more sense? Why?

5 GRAMMAR Multi-word verbs

a What is the meaning of the multi-word verbs in bold? Which multi-word verb is most similar to the verb on its own?

1 All of my friends **were** also really **into** comic books, but none of them tried to **come up with** their own stories.
2 … so we decided to **try** it **out**

b ▶ Now go to Grammar Focus on p.138

6 SPEAKING

a Think of something you've done that you have put a lot of effort into. For example:

• your job
• a free-time activity
• study of some kind
• playing a musical instrument
• learning a language

Make notes about these questions:
1 What special skills or talent do you need?
2 What level of ability do you think you have achieved?
3 How have you learnt new information necessary for this activity?
4 Do you need to remember a lot of things to do this well?
5 How much time have you put into it?

b 💬 Work in small groups. Tell each other about your activity. Ask questions.

c 💬 Who in your group do you think has put in the most effort? Who has been successful?

Appendix 11 Empower transcript

Extract from Doff et al. (2015)

3 LISTENING

a ▶2.27 Martha's going to Antarctica to do research on Adelie penguins. She talks to her friend Joe about her work. Listen and answer the questions.

1 How well does Joe understand Martha's research?
2 Are his questions serious or light-hearted?
3 What do we learn about the personality of the penguins?
4 Why is the research important?

b ▶2.27 Listen again. Number the actions in the correct order from 1 to 5.

☐ the eggs are laid
☐ tags are put on the penguins
☐ penguins get into pairs
☐ Martha arrives in Antarctica
☐ penguin chicks are born

⏵ 2.27

JOE So, when are you off?

MARTHA Monday of next week.

J Exciting.

M Sure is – this time next week I'll be settling into my accommodation.

J So, I mean, what is it you'll be doing? From what I understand … well, you're going down there to keep your eye on some penguins. Is that it?

M Well, I suppose that's one way of looking at it!

J Yeah, but, you know, what will you be doing on a daily basis?

M Well, I'm not entirely sure, but I think I'll be doing similar things every day. It's more or less a question of observing the penguins – counting them, taking photos, checking tags on some of them – that kind of thing.

J OK – so, just kind of standing around in the cold?

M Yes, well, that's the downside of the job. That and the attacks.

J What? From polar bears?

M Erm … at the South Pole? No, from penguins.

J You mean those sweet little birds attack you?

M Oh yes, they're full of attitude – if you get too close.

J And will they be waiting for you when you get there?

M Well, of course – they know I'm coming.

J Very funny. So, there they are – Mr and Mrs Penguin about to play happy families and …?

M Yeah, so, by the time I arrive the penguins will already have got into pairs and then, by the middle of November, each pair of penguins will have laid two eggs.

J You just watch them sit on their eggs? That must be … 'really interesting'.

M I'm sure they'll do something to keep me entertained.

J And then?

M Well, by the end of December, most of the chicks will have arrived and then after about three weeks we put metal tags on them.

J Unless you get attacked by those nasty, aggressive parents.

M We have our methods of defence.

J Sounds scary. OK, this is all very interesting, but, I mean, why? Why's it useful to know what these penguins do? It sounds like they kind of do the same old thing year after year.

M Nothing wrong with predictable – we scientists like that – but sometimes there can be changes, like maybe there are fewer chicks or maybe the parents aren't able to feed the chicks and not as many survive. This can tell us a lot about what's happening in the Antarctic ecosystem.

J Like what exactly?

M Ah, I'm a scientist – I never jump to easy conclusions.

J That's no fun.

M But, in a general sense, if there are changes in the number of penguins or changes in their behaviour, this can tell us that there has been a change in the climate of some sort. It's part of the evidence – the bigger picture, if you like. The work I'll be doing is just a small part in a big project that's been going on for some time. But because Antarctica is such an unspoilt environment the changes that take place there can tell us a lot about what's happening on the rest of the planet.

J And you get to hang out with those cute little penguins.

M Yeah, well … it's just one big penguin party.

J Sounds pretty cool to me.

Appendix 12 Speakout

Extract from (Eales and Oakes, 2011)

1.1 IDEAL FLATMATES

▶ GRAMMAR | direct /indirect questions　▶ VOCABULARY | personality　▶ HOW TO | ask questions politely

SPEAKING

1 Work in pairs and discuss the questions.

1 Who do you live with?

2 Do you think it's easier to live with family, friends or on your own?

LISTENING

2 Read the programme listing and look at the photo. What do you think happens at a 'speed flatmating' event?

3A ▶ 1.1 Listen to the first part of the programme and answer the questions.

1 What happens during the evening?

2 What two things are given to you when you arrive?

Speed flatmating

You might have heard of speed dating – those events for the young, free and single who are just too busy to find the love of their lives – but what about applying the same principle to finding a lodger for your spare room? In today's *You and Yours* on BBC Radio 4, reporter Natalie Steed experiences 'speed flatmating'.

B ▶ 1.2 Listen to the rest of the programme. Match each person with the way they feel about speed flatmating.

1 First man — a) It's important to be honest.

2 Second man — b) It's easy.

3 First woman — c) Confused

4 Second woman — d) He/she doesn't say.

C Listen again. Are the sentences true (T) or false (F)? Correct the false sentences.

1 A white badge means you are looking for a room.
F have got a room to rent.

2 The first man wants someone who will be there most of the time.

3 A pink badge means you are prepared to 'buddy up' (share a bedroom).

4 The second man started looking for a room a fortnight ago.

5 The first woman thinks you can tell a lot at first sight.

6 However, she thinks speed flatmating is embarrassing.

7 The second woman asks quite personal questions.

8 She hasn't found anyone at the speed flatmating event.

4 Work in pairs and discuss the questions.

1 Would you use speed flatmating to find or rent out a room?

2 If you were looking for a flatmate, which of the topics in the box below would you ask about? What sort of questions would you ask?

| relationships | work | daily habits | finances | politics |
| future plans | music | references | weekends | diet |

GRAMMAR direct and indirect questions

5A Look at the conversation from a speed flatmating event and complete the questions.

A: So where ¹_____ you staying at the moment?

B: Quite near here.

A: Oh, who are you living ²_____ ?

B: Some friends from college. I'm just staying there on a temporary basis until I find a flat.

A: Right. And what ³_____ you decide to come to the city in the first place?

B: I work for a big sportswear company and they've just relocated here.

A: And have you any idea how ⁴_____ you want to stay here?

B: At least a year, I hope. I suppose it depends how it works out.

A: Do you mind me asking ⁵_____ you're in a relationship?

B: No, that's OK. No, I'm single at the moment.

A: One more question. Er, what are you ⁶_____ in the mornings? It's just that I'm not at my best early in the day.

B: Me neither. I don't usually talk to anyone till after my first coffee at work!

B ▶ 1.3 Listen and check your answers.

8

Appendix 13 Worksheet

Comprehension questions written by Amalia

Endangered languages

LOSS: n|u language

Vocabulary and questions	
Apartheid	
Enforced	
A dream is mentioned, can you explain?	
Which documents are mentioned?	
Which Language related to Dutch is mentioned?	
figures: 6 million; 10. Say what these are about.	
What is the reason for the disappearance of n|u?	
How do these old people sound like?	
What strikes you, in particular about them, what they say?	

REVIVAL: Wampanoag language

Vocabulary and questions	
Why is it so important?	
Explain these numbers: 69, 4,300,125	
How come Wampanoag language could be brought back to life?	
Which documents are mentioned?	
"the Rosetta Stone": why is it mentioned here?	
What are the children taught about the language?	

Appendix 14 Concept map

Conception of English (school English, formal English, British English)

Teaching to the test ("what Cambridge wants")

T belief about future learners' needs

Content-based teaching

T attribution for Ls' failures&successes = INNATE APTITUDE + RESILIENCE

Mixed abilities, big gap in listening

T emotions ---> T reflexivity

Beliefs about exams, "creative" teaching practices

trumps

leads to

Listening difficulties

"Positive" practices: praise, respecting silence, differentiation

leads to

helps prevent

Simplified listening: long pre-listening, set sequence, guiding questions, use of textbook, "comprehensible" varieties

Use of textbook

Assumption that learners understood, no follow-up

clash with

BOUNDARIES TO LEARNING

builds

Ls' emotions

Ls' self-concept

Structural view of language & language learning

Exams

influence

influences

leads to

literature

influences

syllabus

Purpose of listening = vocab + structures (tacitly?)

*self-imposed constraints?

Appendix 15 Publications and presentations

Publications

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Bruzzano, C. 2019. L'ascolto nella didattica dell'inglese: processo o prodotto? *LEND, Lingua e nuova didattica.* **2**, pp.8-9.

Bruzzano, C. 2020c. Why do you do what you do? Teacher and learner beliefs about listening in the EFL classroom. In: Mackay, J., et al. eds. *ELT Research in Action. Bringing together two communities of practice.* Faversham: IATEFL, pp.47-50.

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Bruzzano, C. 2018b. Reflective practice for language teachers: enhancing teaching practice by studying the teaching mind. In: *Sc[Arti]: Riflessioni sul residuo tra selezione e divergenza*, *8 November, University of Milan, Italy*.

Bruzzano, C. 2018c. Why don't they understand? Using listening difficulties productively. In: *TESOL Italy National Convention, 17 November, Rome, Italy*.

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Bruzzano, C. 2019b. Why do you do what you do? Teacher and learner beliefs about listening in the EFL classroom. In: *ELT Research in Action, 27 April, University of Barcelona, Spain*.

Bruzzano, C. 2020a. Analysing Listening Difficulties: Insights from a Multiple Case Study. Paper accepted for presentation at *TESOL International Convention and English Language Expo, 1 April, Denver, USA*.

Bruzzano, C. 2020b. The why and how of EFL listening: a case study. Paper accepted for presentation at *IATEFL 54th Annual International IATEFL Conference & Exhibition*, *April, Manchester, UK*.

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