

EFL listening and secondary school learners: evidence from a multiple case study

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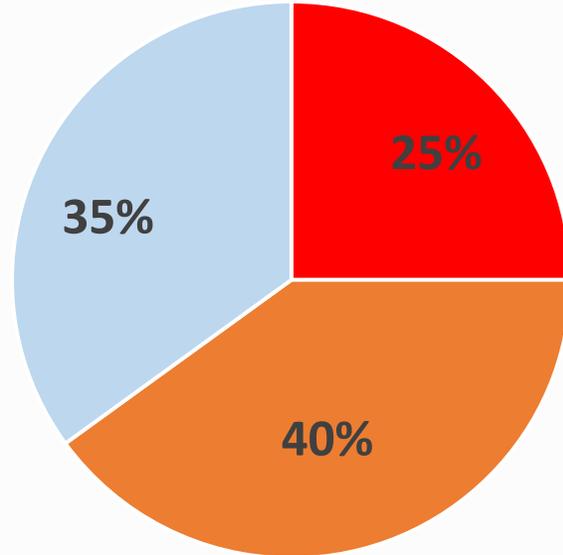
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Outline

1. Listening: what it is and why it is difficult
2. Research on learners' beliefs
3. Methodology
4. Preliminary findings
5. Implications for teaching

Listening and Italian learners: what do we know?

INVALSI results (2018) – grade 13



■ <B1 ■ B1 ■ B2

Paucity of
classroom-based
research in schools

Listening in English as a foreign language

 1) **Decoding**: translating the acoustic cues into sounds, syllables, words and phrases in the target language and then into an abstract idea (literal meaning)

 **Meaning-building**: drawing upon knowledge of the world, the speaker and what has been said to enrich the literal meaning derived from decoding

(Field, 2008)

What makes listening difficult?

Text

- vocabulary
- grammar
- syntax

Task

- gap-fill
- comprehension questions

Speaker

- accent
- speed
- hesitations

Relevance

- topic
- background knowledge

Surroundings

- background noise

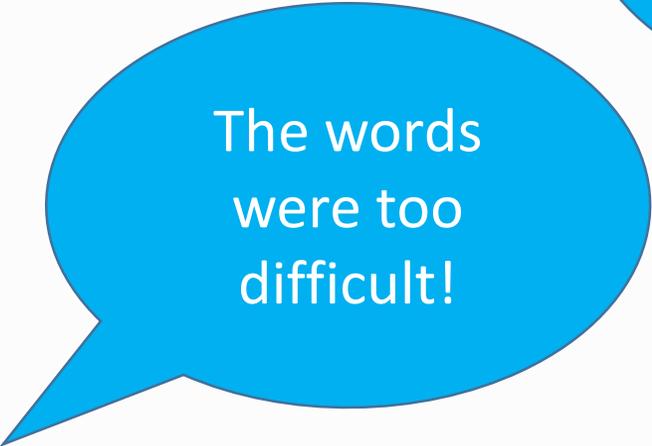
Listener

- emotions
- concentration
- processing, working memory

Internal

How do learners perceive listening? Research on learners' beliefs about listening

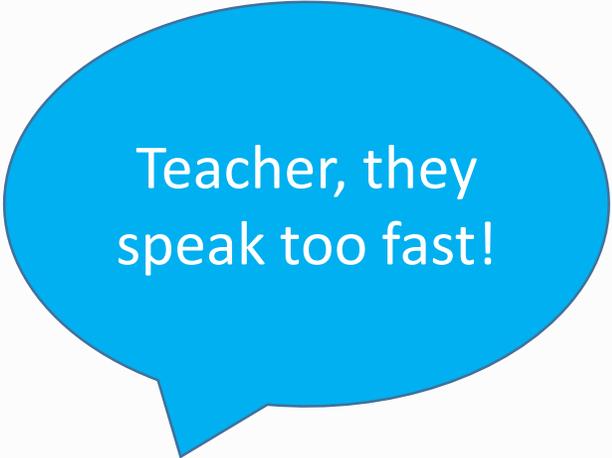
- Learners may not be the best judges of difficulty (Révész and Brunfaut, 2013):



The words
were too
difficult!



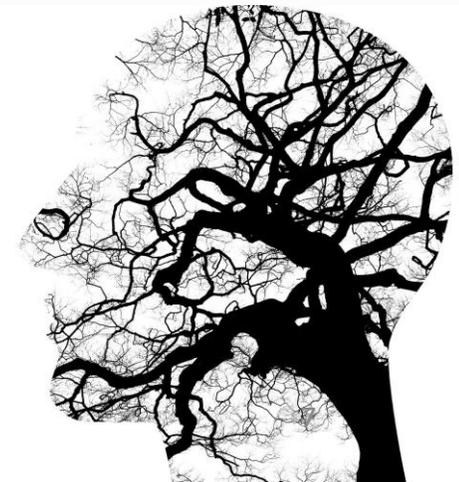
He had a
weird accent



Teacher, they
speak too fast!

Research on learners' beliefs about listening

- Learners find listening difficult (Chang et al., 2013), feel incapable (Graham, 2006), perceive it as uncontrollable and may not enjoy it.
- Listening anxiety is a common phenomenon that can impact comprehension (Zhang, 2013; Mills et al., 2006)



Self-efficacy and attributions

Self-efficacy: ‘the belief in one’s ability to accomplish a task’ (Bandura, 1993)



Attributions: the reasons we give to explain perceived success or failure (Weiner, 1972)

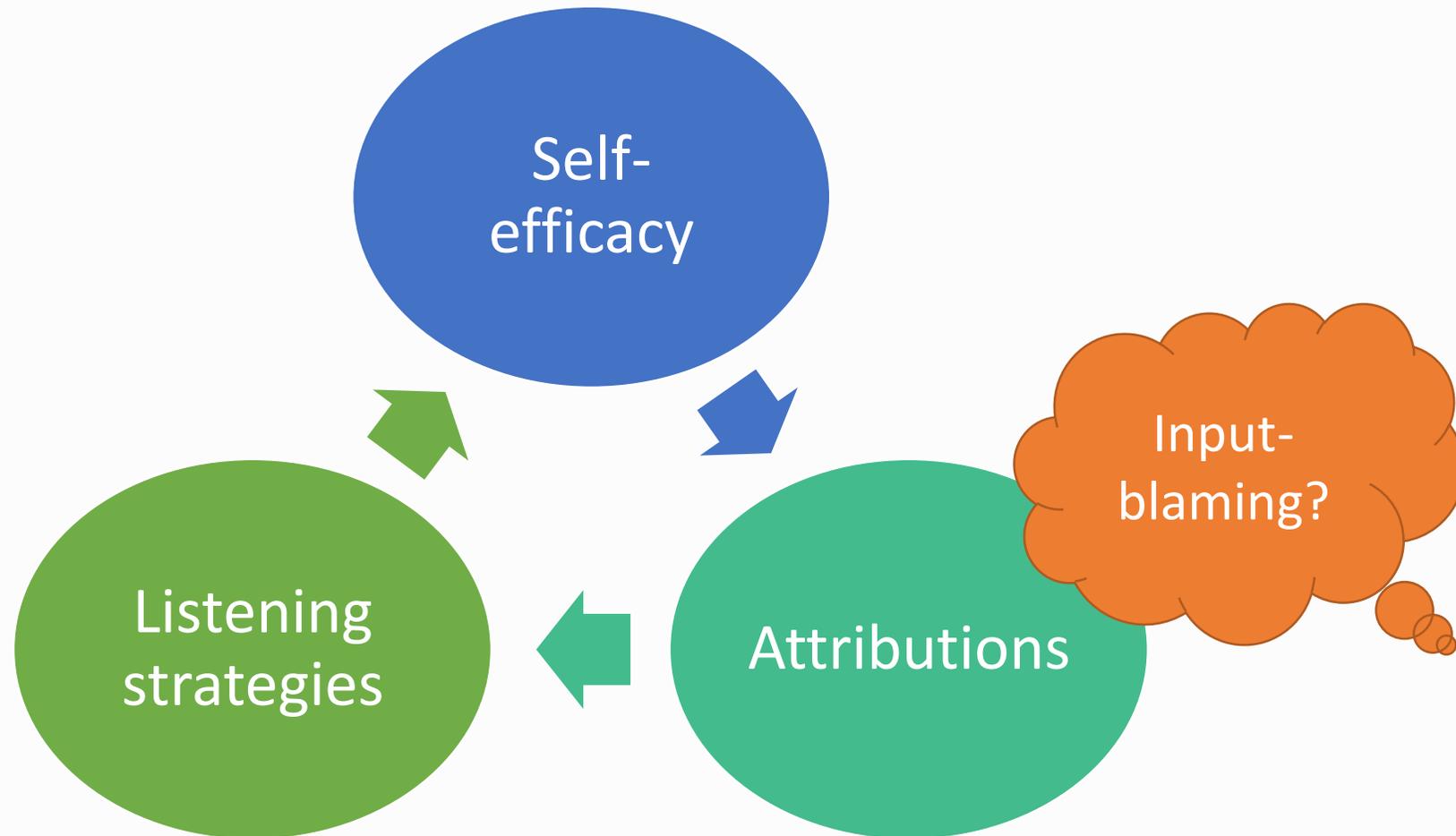
Controllable factors: effort,
strategy use

“I failed because I didn’t try
hard enough”

Uncontrollable factors:
aptitude, task difficulty

“I failed because they spoke
too fast”

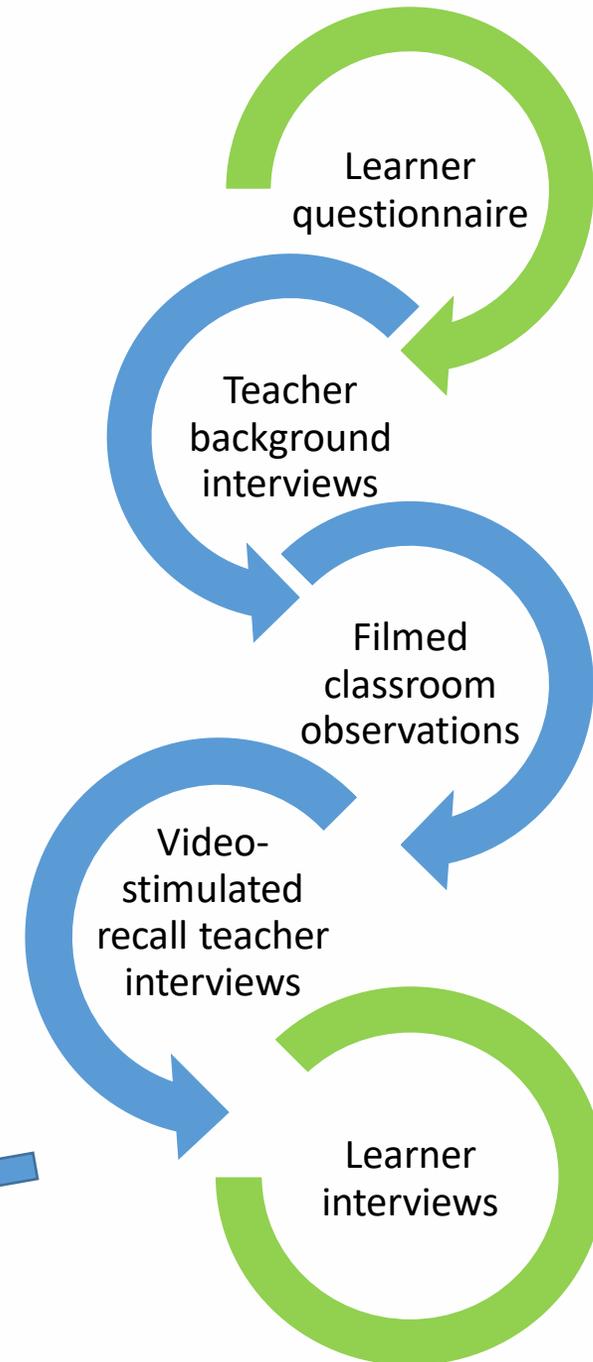
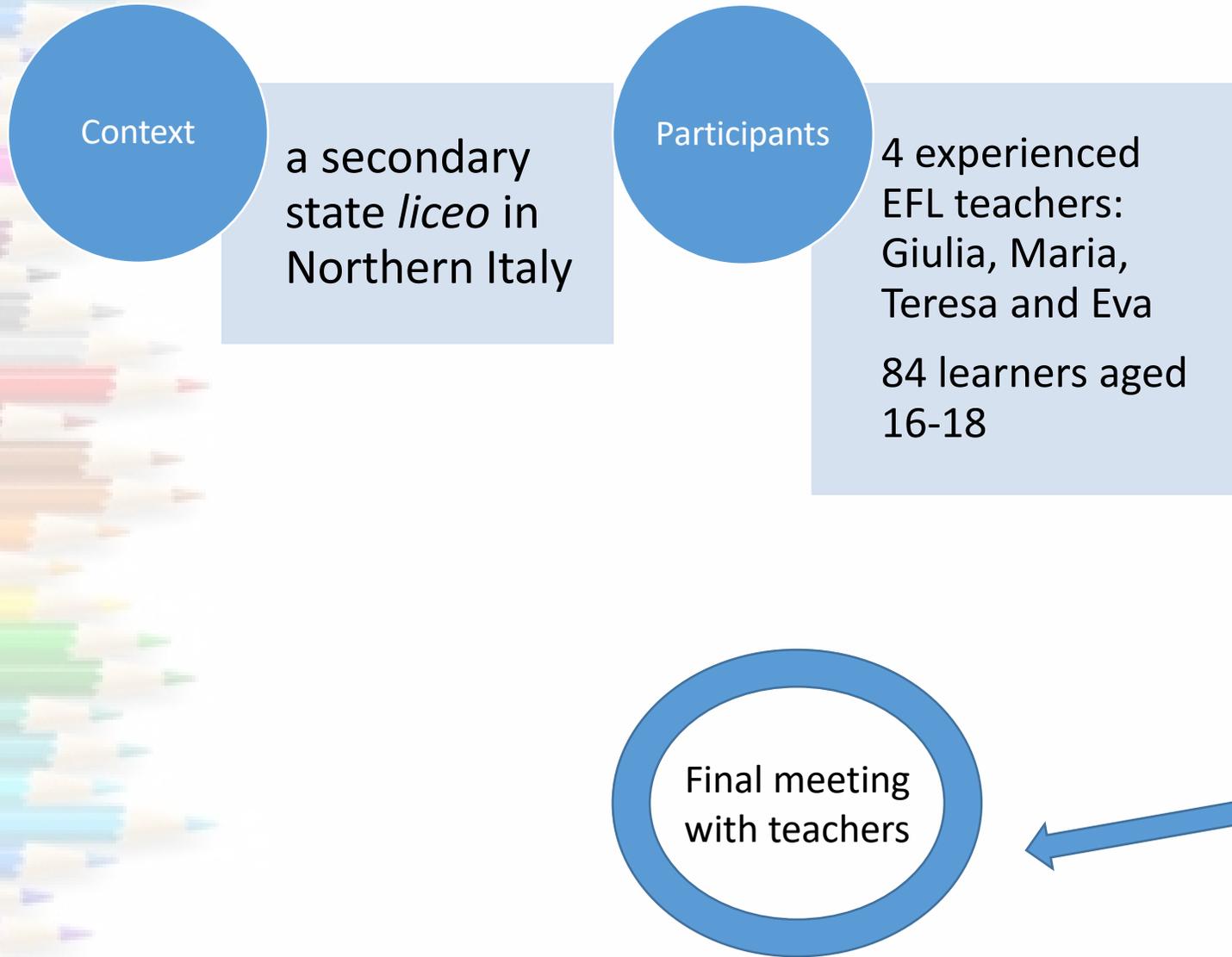
Research on learners' beliefs about listening



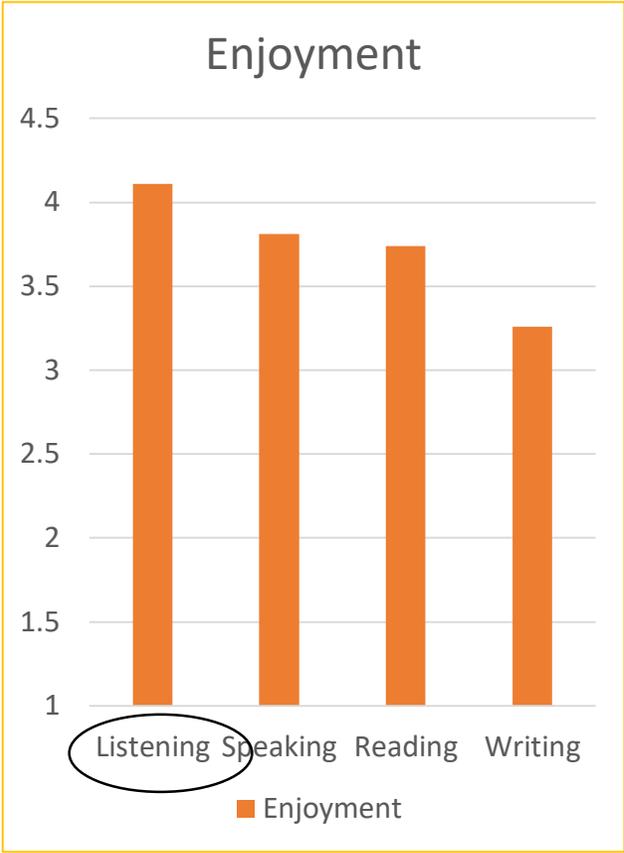
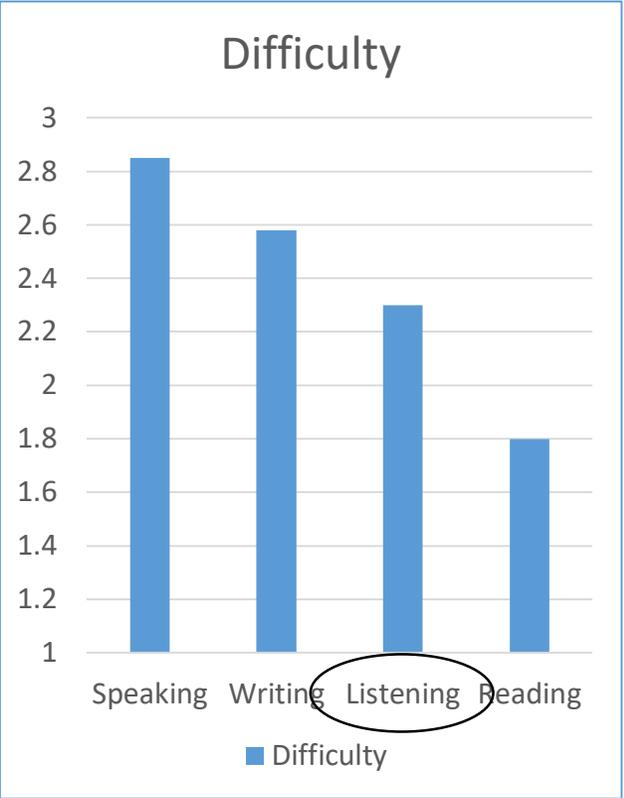
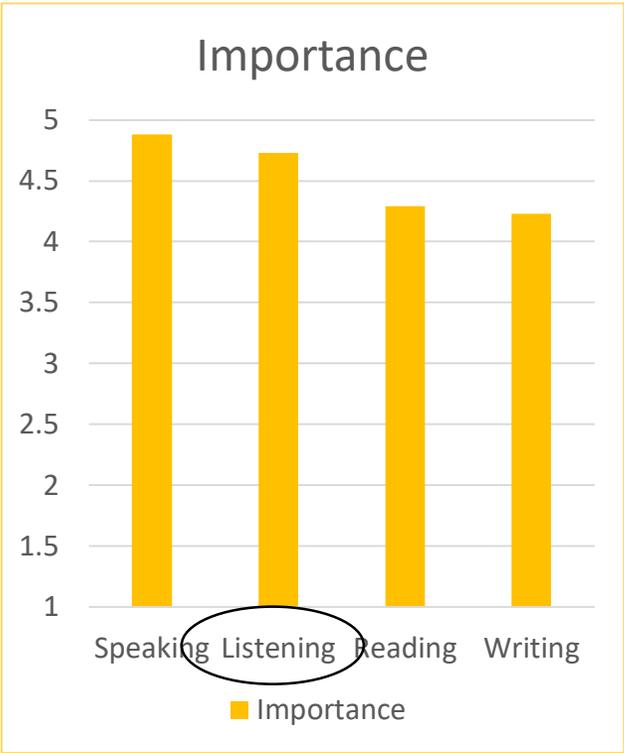
Research questions

1. What are the learners' beliefs and practices concerning EFL listening?
2. How can awareness of learners' beliefs and practices inform teaching?

Methodology

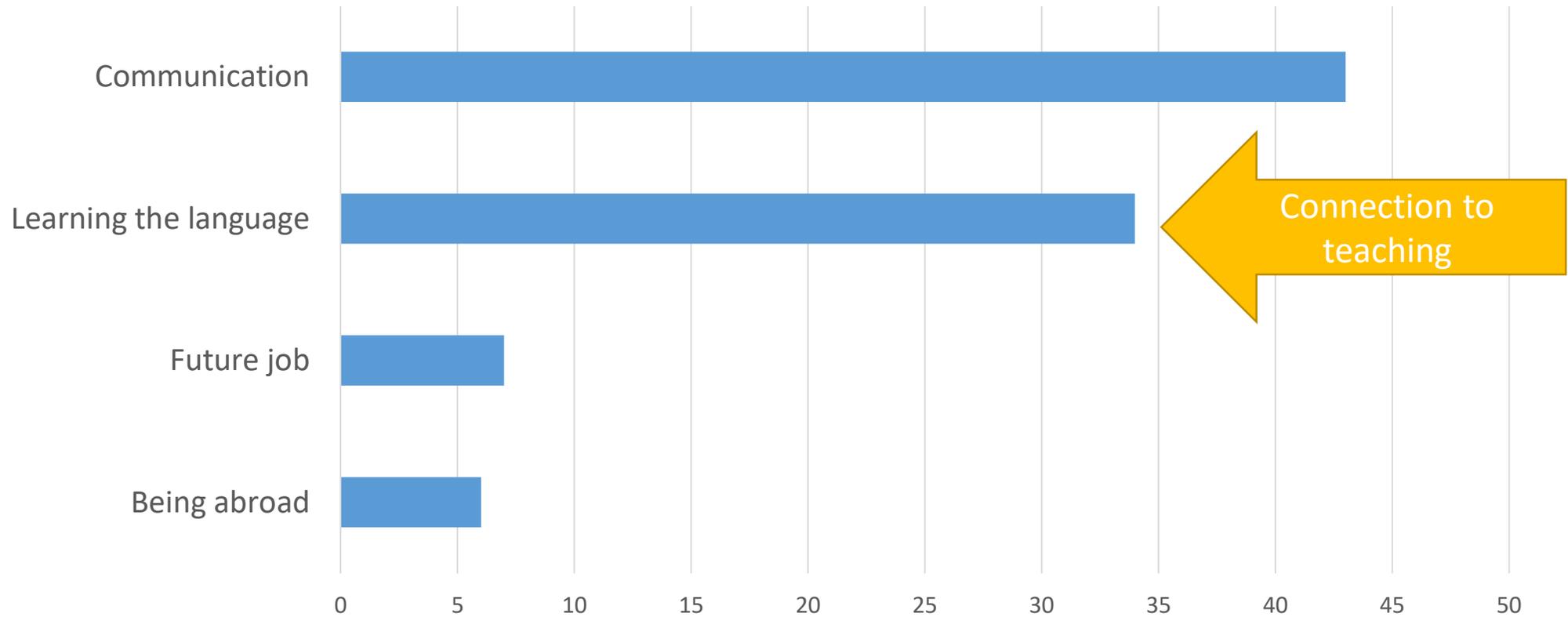


Preliminary findings



Preliminary findings

Why is it important to learn to listen?



Preliminary findings: learners' emotions

More negative than positive:

- listening anxiety
- test anxiety
- tiredness

Developed affective strategies

Positive emotions:

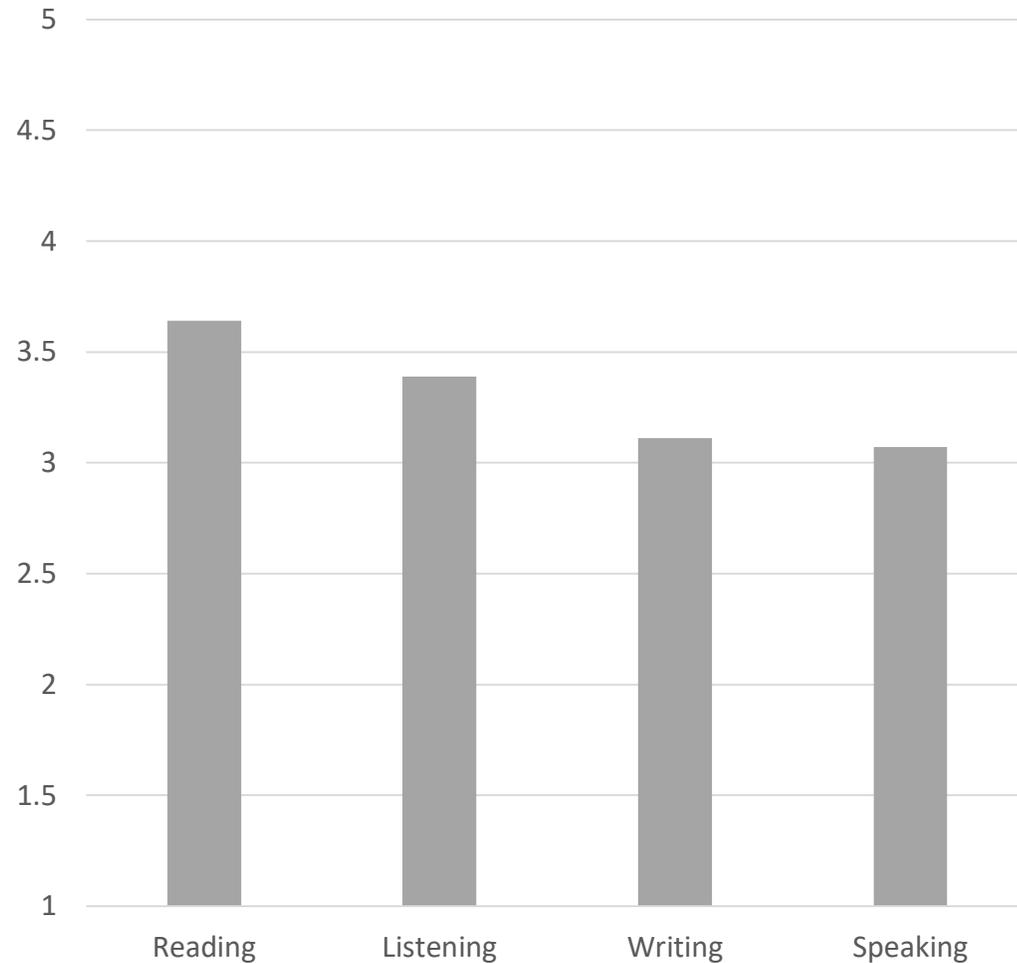
- calmness
- “stubbornness”



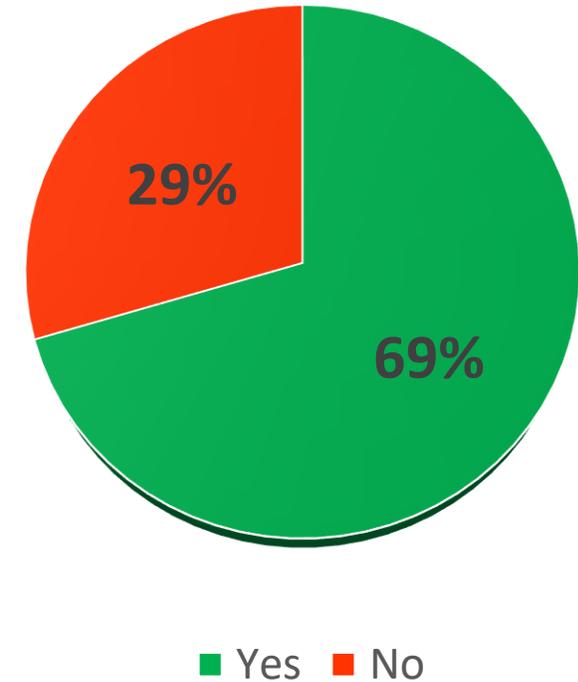
Is there an “optimal” level of listening anxiety?

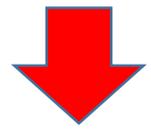
Preliminary findings: self-efficacy

Self-rated success in four skills



Can you do most listening activities in class?





Low self-efficacy group: attributions

Task difficulty

«Most of the audios aren't clear and they speak too fast»

«I'm generally not very good at listening exercises in school»

Aptitude



High self-efficacy group: attributions

Effort

«I always try to listen to music and watch films in English so I can improve more and more. This helps me understand in most listening tasks in school»

«I'm more naturally inclined than others I think [...] but I also practise lots at home»

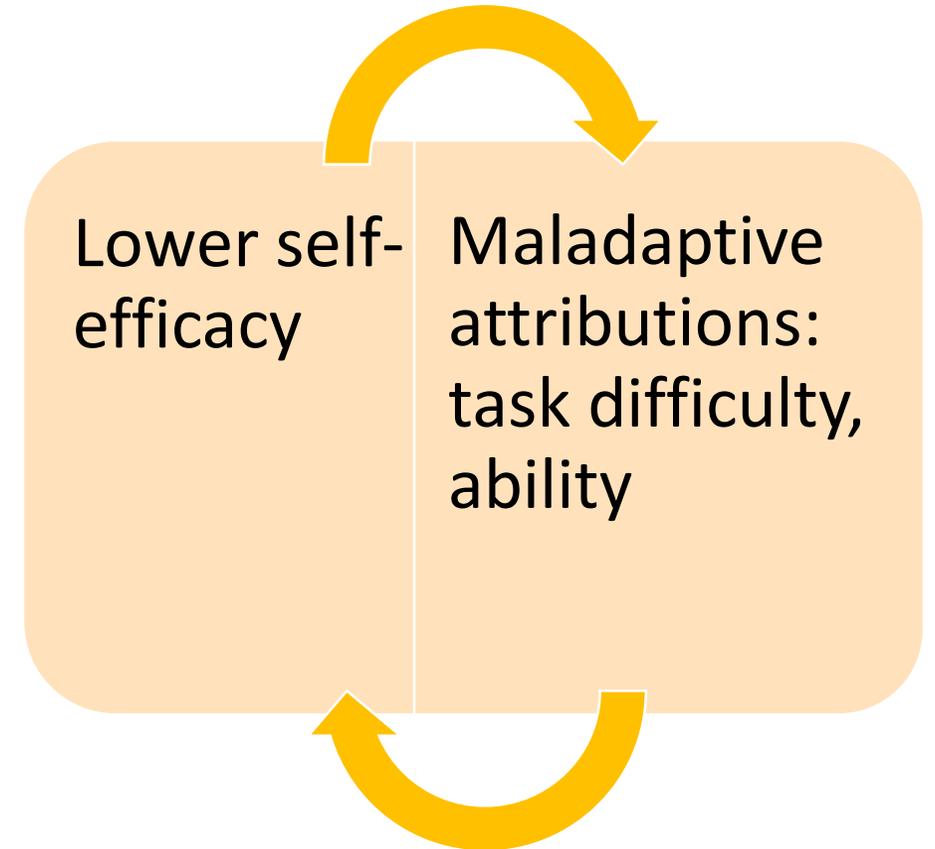
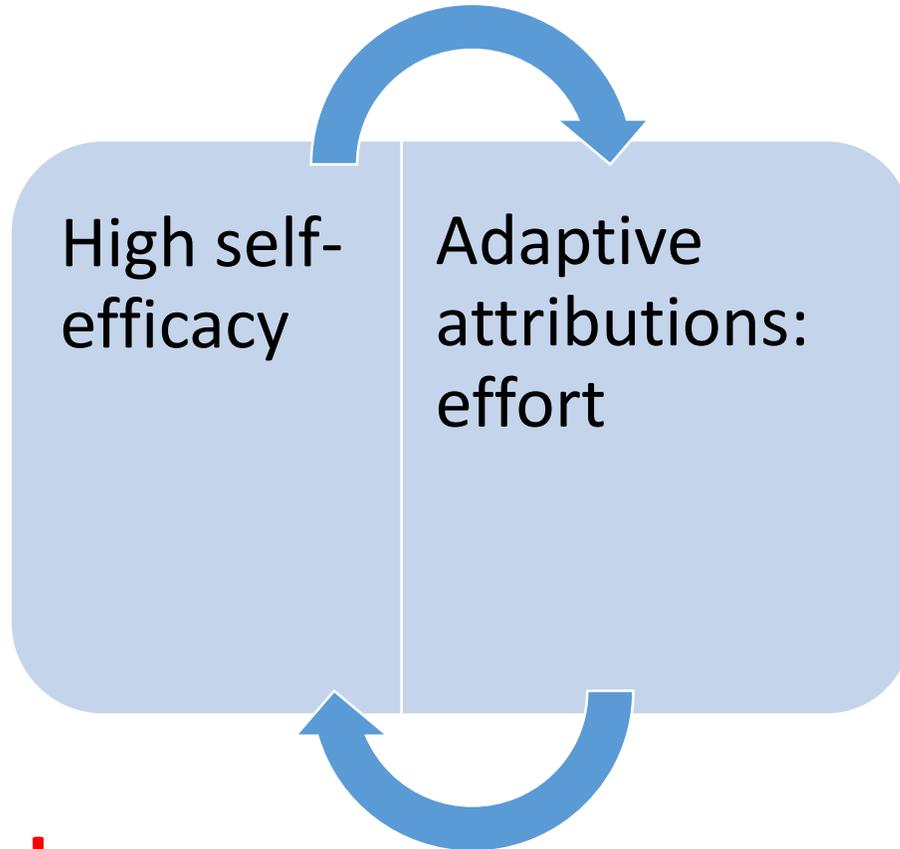
Aptitude

Reference to task completion as benchmark

Task difficulty



Self-efficacy and attributions



! Reference to task completion as benchmark for success?



Listening difficulties

Speaker variables

- ☀ Accent
 - Speed
 - Connected speech

Listener variables

- Concentration
- Emotions
- Processing

Text variables

- ☀ Words
 - Topic

Task variables

- ☀ Writing + listening
 - Reading + listening
 - Reformulating
 - Answering



Listening difficulties: high self-efficacy students

High self-efficacy students interviewed reported struggling comparatively less with:

Emotions

Speed

Words

Task

...but they described in detail issues of connected speech

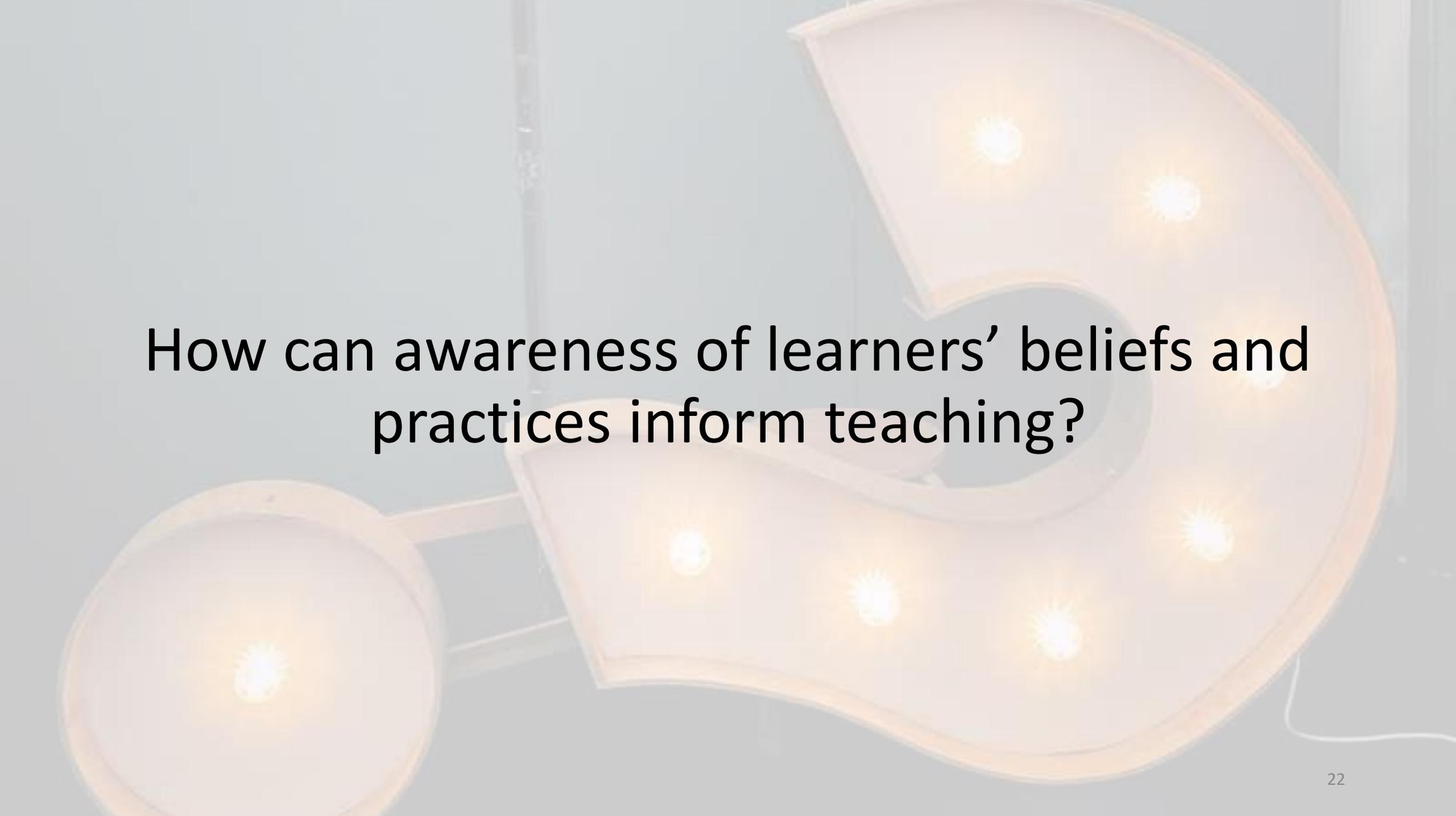
Implications

- ❖ Better able to handle task mechanics
- ❖ Less dependent on word-level decoding, more automatic processing
- ❖ Better management of their emotions
- ❖ Able to articulate difficulties in more details (e.g. connected speech)

Listening strategies

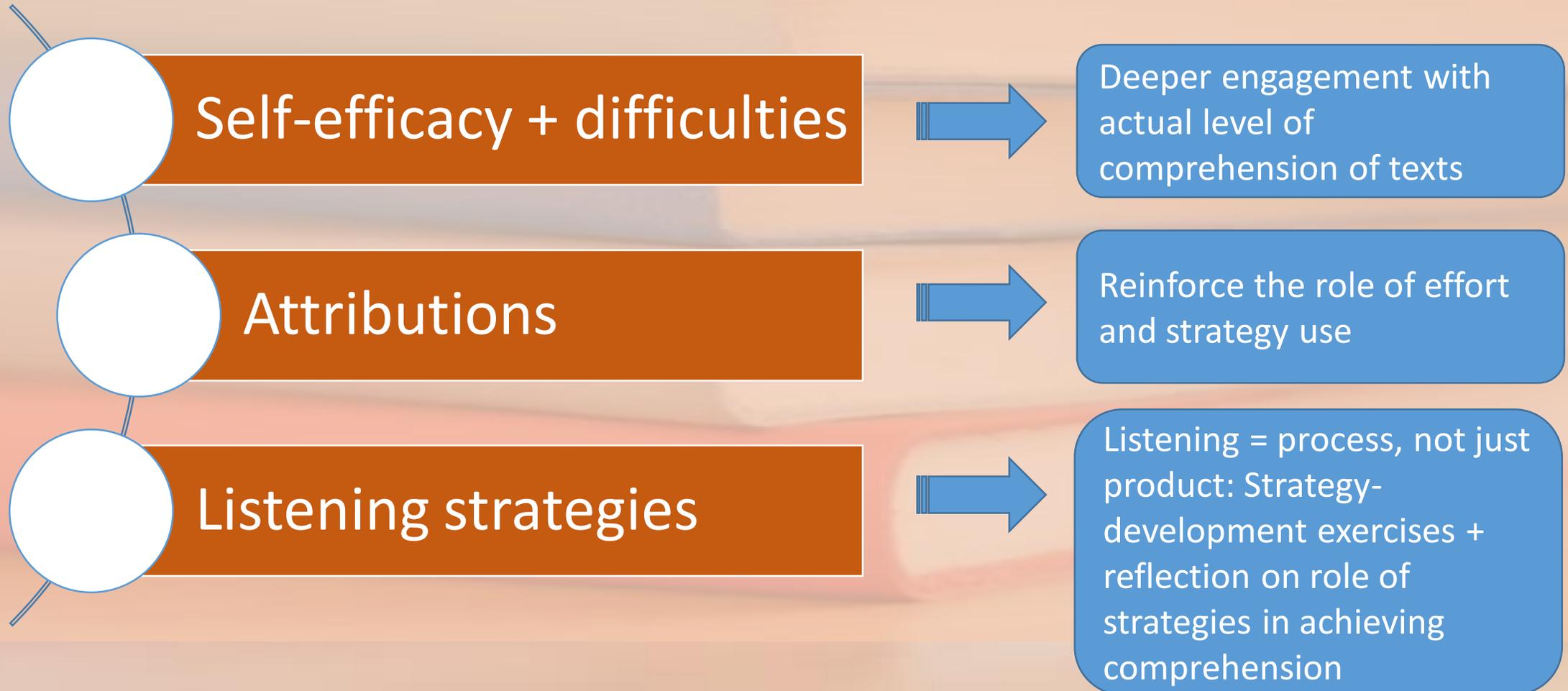
- **Socioaffective:** managing anxiety, persevering in the face of difficulty, asking peers for help
- **Top-down meaning-building:** using world knowledge, guessing
- **Management of task mechanics:** making notes, choosing which questions to answer first
- **Management of words:** looking up words, trying to understand all words
- **Exploiting visual cues:** focusing on speaker's lips, focusing on pictures



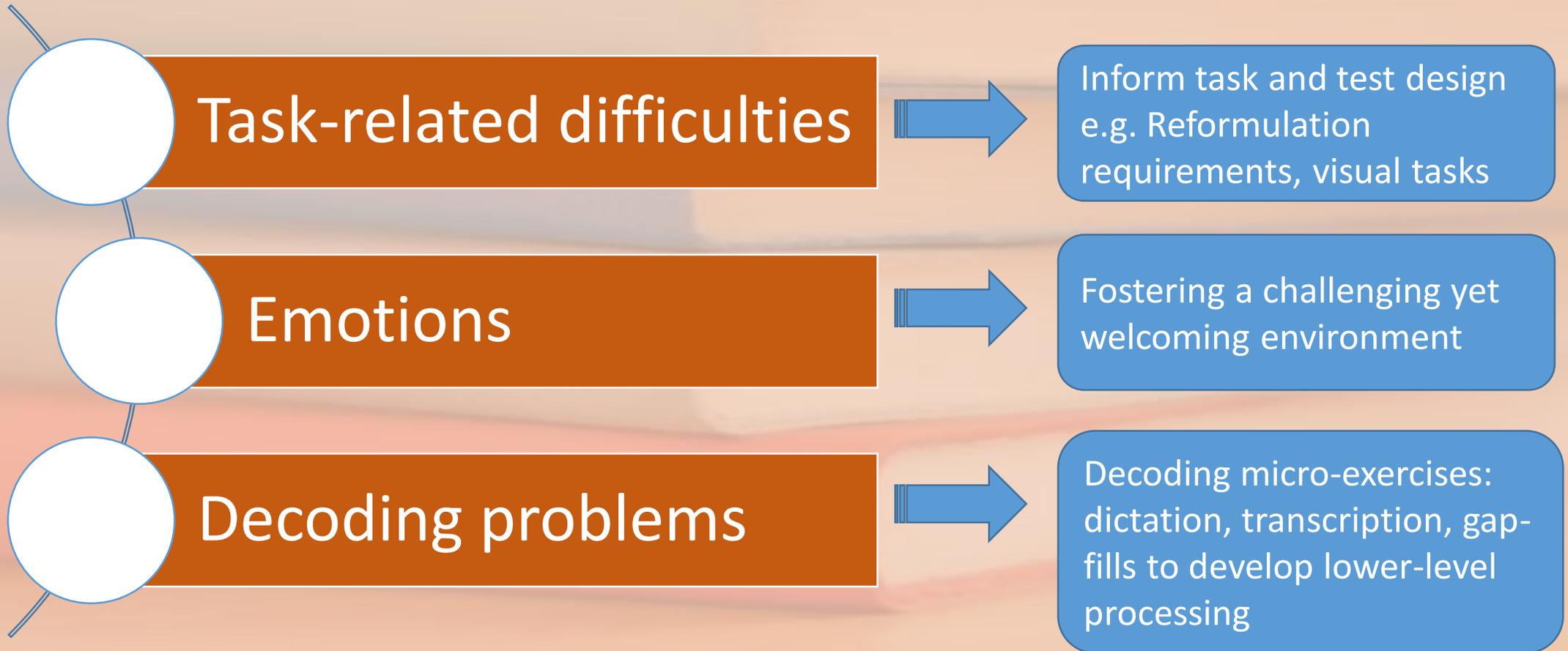


How can awareness of learners' beliefs and practices inform teaching?

Implications for teaching: insights from meetings with teachers



Implications for teaching: insights from meetings with teachers



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Thank you for (successfully applying your
decoding and meaning-building skills to)
listening!

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