

Redefining Challenges in English Listening Comprehension through Ellipsis Repair, Boundary Overrun, and Disfluent Clause Markers

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ABSTRACT

This study redefined English listening comprehension in the Indonesian EFL context by analyzing the interpretive challenges posed by ellipsis repair, boundary overrun, and disfluent clause markers features that were often overlooked in pedagogical models. Ellipsis repair referred to a listener's attempt to reconstruct omitted elements in spontaneous speech, often caused by speakers backtracking or self-correcting mid-utterance. Boundary overrun described a speaker's tendency to extend or blur syntactic units across intonation or clause boundaries, which made real-time parsing difficult. Disfluent clause markers included fillers, false starts, and hesitations that interrupted clause structure and challenged linear meaning construction. Conducted at three private universities in Indonesia located on Medan (North Sumatra), Manado (North Sulawesi), and Makassar (South Sulawesi), the research involved pre-intermediate-level students who engaged with authentic spoken English data. Using a qualitative discourse-based approach, the study examined comprehension breakdowns through think-aloud protocols and clause-level analysis. Findings revealed that listener difficulties were not incidental but structurally rooted in disrupted syntax and prosody. These disruptions challenged students' ability to construct coherent meaning in real time. The study highlighted the need for instructional models that developed interpretive resilience, not just lexical decoding. It called for a shift toward listening pedagogies attuned to spontaneous speech, structural ambiguity, and repair negotiation. The findings offered implications for EFL curriculum design, assessment development, and real-world communication training across Indonesian educational contexts.

Keywords: *Boundary overrun, Disfluent clause markers, EFL pedagogy, Ellipsis repair, English listening comprehension*

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INTRODUCTION

English listening comprehension has traditionally been framed within paradigms that prioritize lexical recognition, grammatical knowledge, and main-idea identification. While these models remain foundational, they often fail to capture the dynamic, interrupted, and unpredictable nature of spoken discourse. This limitation becomes especially apparent in authentic listening contexts where speakers frequently hesitate, reformulate ideas, or produce elliptical constructions (Stevani et al., 2025; Tao & Aryadoust, 2024). In classroom practice, particularly in English as Foreign Language (EFL) settings in Indonesia, the dominant approach continues to train students using clean-scripted audio. As a result, listening pedagogy becomes misaligned with the real-world complexity of natural speech. This misalignment creates a false sense of comprehension competence. Learners may perform well in controlled settings, yet their understanding breaks down when faced with spontaneous conversations, unscripted interviews, or natural speech in podcasts. These environments are

not structured to accommodate tidy grammatical delivery; instead, they are filled with disruptions, repairs, and shifts in clause structure. Therefore, a redefinition of English listening comprehension is urgently needed: one that directly addresses the syntactic and pragmatic disruptions encountered in real-time processing, including ellipsis repair, boundary overrun, and disfluent clause markers.

Ellipsis repair refers to the listener's ability to mentally reconstruct missing syntactic elements based on contextual cues (Abdujabbarovna, 2025). This process presents a significant cognitive challenge. Unlike written ellipsis which benefits from visual structure and slower pace, spoken ellipsis is influenced by fleeting prosodic cues, temporal constraints, and incomplete syntactic closure. For instance, a speaker might say, "I thought he – but never mind." In such cases, the omitted content must be inferred, requiring the listener to actively recover intent and syntactic trajectory on the spot.

Boundary overrun occurs when speakers extend clauses beyond expected grammatical boundaries (Artuso et al., 2025). This often violates the listener's expectations of clause-finality. These overruns are typical in spontaneous speech and are usually marked by hesitations or recursive structures. An example would be: "What I meant was – not what I said – but what I tried to say was..." Such structures force the listener to suspend interpretation mid-clause, holding unresolved syntactic dependencies while adjusting to the speaker's evolving meaning. This process places heavy demands on real-time cognitive processing.

Disfluent clause markers such as "uh," "you know," "I mean," and "like" add further complexity (Siegel et al., 2025). These markers often interrupt clause formation, redirect attention, or falsely signal repair. While they may appear trivial, they carry significant functional weight in spoken interaction. Rather than dismissing them as noise, this study treats them as essential scaffolds in comprehension, functioning as cues for processing shifts, speaker hesitation, or conversational alignment. When listeners fail to interpret these cues appropriately, misunderstandings arise not from vocabulary deficits but from missed discourse-level signals.

The theoretical grounding of this study draws from discourse processing theory, cognitive psycholinguistics, and interactional sociolinguistics. Miao et al. (2025) and Cai et al. (2025) demonstrated that speech production and comprehension are non-linear processes involving ongoing monitoring, self-repair, and forward projection. Building on this, Mekheimer & Fageeh (2025) emphasized the grammatical looseness of conversational speech, which diverges significantly from the fixed structures found in written registers. Zora et al. (2025) added that spoken discourse reflects fragmented, moment-to-moment idea units closely tied to consciousness and attention. From a cognitive perspective, listeners must continuously adjust to shifting syntactic cues and prosodic irregularities. These disruptions are not obstacles to be filtered out; they are core components of meaning-making. Halliday's systemic functional grammar in 1994 provides an additional framework, showing that clause complexity in spoken texts emerges from thematic progression and the negotiation of interpersonal meanings (Kamiya, 2025). These theoretical insights collectively underscore the central argument of this study: that ellipsis repair, boundary overrun, and disfluent clause markers are not peripheral irregularities but central mechanisms in real-time comprehension.

A review of existing studies in English listening comprehension reveals a persistent overreliance on scripted materials and idealized speech models. Bozorgian & Shamsi (2025), for instance, have advocated for a metacognitive approach to listening. However, even their model implicitly assumes clean and well-structured input. Su (2025) critiques this tendency by highlighting the dominance of the "native-speaker norm" in listening assessments and calls instead for processing-based evaluations that reflect the cognitive realities of real-time comprehension. Studies such as Stevani (2024) and Waqas et al. (2025) confirm that Indonesian EFL students frequently struggle with connected speech. Yet, their analyses often fail to isolate syntactic disruptions or prosodic misalignments as central variables in comprehension difficulty. In parallel, research on discourse markers such as Hsin et al. (2025) has largely focused on speaker production features, paying limited attention to how such elements challenge the listener's interpretive process. Consequently, although individual phenomena

like ellipsis, boundary shifts, and disfluencies have received scholarly attention, there is a striking lack of integrated research that examines their cumulative effect on listening comprehension, especially within instructional contexts.

This study addresses that critical gap by redefining English listening comprehension not as the ability to identify lexical items or grammatical forms, but as the capacity to negotiate structural interruptions, perform ellipsis repair, and navigate syntactic ambiguity in real time. Such a reconceptualization does more than reframe the act of understanding spoken English and it fundamentally challenges the assumptions that underlie most pedagogical designs. It calls for a listening pedagogy that foregrounds tolerance for ambiguity, emphasizes syntactic flexibility, and trains learners to work with disfluent and repaired speech. The novelty of this research lies in its triangulated analysis of ellipsis repair, boundary overrun, and disfluent clause markers not as isolated difficulties, but as co-occurring and mutually reinforcing burdens in authentic spoken discourse. By examining naturally occurring speech and tracing comprehension breakdowns among Indonesian EFL learners, this study proposes an interpretive, structure-sensitive model that directly contrasts with the prevailing linear and decoding-based listening models found in current curricula.

This study carries several important implications. Pedagogically, it challenges the design of listening materials that sanitize speech for clarity, pushing instead for materials that embrace the structural complexity of spoken interaction. Theoretically, it offers a model that bridges discourse analysis with comprehension research, treating syntactic irregularities not as noise, but as central components of meaning-making. In the context of Indonesian EFL instruction, it contributes urgently needed empirical evidence on how learners respond to unscripted input. These findings can inform the design of listening tasks, test formats, textbooks, and teacher training programs, especially in environments where authentic input is rarely available. In essence, the study repositions listening comprehension as an act of real-time structural interpretation, rather than a passive process of decoding and recall.

On this basis, the study is guided by the following central problems: (1) How do ellipsis repair, boundary overrun, and disfluent clause markers impact Indonesian EFL learners' comprehension of authentic English listening texts? (2) What types of comprehension breakdowns are structurally traceable to these discourse features, and how are they manifested in learners' interpretive processes? These guiding questions aim not only to generate theoretical insights into the nature of listening comprehension but also to inform practical transformations in instructional design, redefining both the content of what is taught and the frameworks through which listening is understood.

METHOD

Research Design

This study used a qualitative, discourse-based approach grounded in the interpretive analysis of authentic English listening data (Effatpanah et al., 2025). It aimed to investigate how ellipsis repair, boundary overrun, and disfluent clause markers affect listening comprehension among Indonesian EFL learners. Rather than viewing comprehension as the outcome of correct answers or isolated listening performance, the study conceptualized it as a dynamic and cognitively mediated process. This process is traceable through patterns of interpretive struggle, reconstruction attempts, and misalignments with speaker intention. Such a methodological orientation enabled a close examination of how learners construct meaning when encountering structurally disrupted speech. The focus, therefore, was not on the listener's failure, but on the structural origins of comprehension breakdown.

Research Participants

These participants, aged 19 to 23, were pre-intermediate to intermediate English education majors from three private universities in Indonesia located on Medan (North Sumatra), Manado (North Sulawesi), and Makassar (South Sulawesi). They were purposefully selected to ensure a level of linguistic proficiency adequate for engaging with natural spoken input, while remaining vulnerable to discourse-level comprehension challenges.

Data Collection



The primary data consisted of two parallel sources. The first set included transcriptions of authentic spoken English, drawn from publicly available interviews, podcasts, and spontaneous dialogues involving native and near-native speakers. The second set comprised comprehension transcripts and verbal protocols produced by Indonesian EFL learners who listened to these segments and reported their understanding. Each participant listened to 12 short clips between 30 to 60 seconds in length. Each clip contained at least one target feature such as ellipsis or boundary overrun or disfluent clause markers which were carefully coded and verified by two trained coders.

Data Analysis

The analysis process consisted of three interlocking stages. First, each speech segment was transcribed using discourse transcription conventions adapted from Zhao and Aryadoust (2025), with particular attention to syntactic disruptions. Elliptical structures were defined as clauses missing expected syntactic constituents, requiring listeners to infer the omitted elements. Boundary overruns were identified as delayed or recursive closures extending beyond conventional clause boundaries in multi-clause constructions. Disfluent clause markers referred to features such as filled pauses, self-repairs, and parenthetical inserts that interrupted clause cohesion and fluidity.

Second, participants' comprehension was elicited through immediate paraphrasing and guided think-aloud protocols. These verbal responses were subjected to thematic analysis, focusing on patterns of misinterpretation, attempted repairs, and clause-level misalignments. This stage offered a window into how learners processed structurally disrupted input and highlighted where comprehension breakdowns most frequently occurred.

Third, instances of comprehension failure were cross-analyzed against the original speech disruptions to identify specific structural triggers. This comparison enabled researchers to trace learners' cognitive responses to problematic syntactic and prosodic features. An interpretive coding framework was developed iteratively, drawing on theoretical constructs from speech processing theory, conversation analysis, and listener inferencing. This ensured analytical depth and coherence across the dataset.

To ensure analytic rigor, two independent coders were involved in the analysis: one a trained discourse analyst and the other an English education lecturer. They collaboratively coded all transcription and comprehension data. Any divergences in interpretation were resolved through negotiated consensus. In addition, memo-writing was employed throughout the process to document evolving interpretive insights and analytic decisions.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical clearance was obtained for the study, and all participants provided informed consent. Importantly, the study did not rely on binary scoring of correct versus incorrect answers. Instead, it prioritized structural traceability: the ability to map where comprehension difficulties occurred and why, specifically in relation to discourse structures rather than learner deficiencies. This methodological emphasis allowed for a more varied and depth-oriented understanding of how listeners engage with real-time clause negotiation. This approach was intentionally chosen to challenge conventional and testing-oriented listening methodologies, which often obscure the syntactic and discourse-level sources of misunderstanding. By foregrounding how listeners respond to structurally disrupted input in authentic speech, the study offers an alternative model of comprehension: one that sees listening not as a measure of passive accuracy, but as an active and interpretive process.

Ultimately, this method aligns with the study's central aim: to redefine English listening comprehension as a cognitively demanding act of clause-level reasoning under conditions of structural instability. It seeks to trace how Indonesian EFL learners engage, adapt, and sometimes misalign when navigating the linguistic complexity of authentic spoken English.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Ellipsis-Induced Processing Delay in Listening

One of the earliest challenges observed was ellipsis-induced processing delay, where students struggled to recover implied meaning in fast-paced audio. Using Halliday's theory of textual cohesion in 1994 and cognitive macrostructure processing (Schmitz et al., 2025), five

examples revealed gaps in decoding truncated referents. For example, in the audio input “He wanted to, but —,” students often failed to reconstruct the omitted predicate. The listening transcripts and post-task reflections showed uncertainty not in lexis but in syntactic retrieval. The ellipsis was often unrecoverable due to semantic vagueness or lack of prior schemata. This breakdown disrupted global coherence construction, as listeners were forced to infer causal or concessive intent without access to explicit lexical markers. The findings suggest that foreign language listeners depend more heavily on overt clause cues than native speakers do. As a result, frequent ellipsis often triggers interpretive failures in comprehension.

Student responses during interviews revealed varied cognitive reactions to ellipsis-induced processing delays. One student admitted, “When I heard ‘He told me to, but —,’ I waited for more words. I didn’t understand what ‘but’ was referring to because the sentence felt cut off. I thought maybe it was a new topic.” This response illustrates how the absence of a recoverable predicate led to confusion about discourse continuity, forcing the listener to guess rather than infer meaning from structural cues. In contrast, another student reflected, “I noticed sometimes it’s not the vocabulary that makes it hard. It’s like my brain wants to hear a full sentence, and when it doesn’t come, I freeze.” This reaction highlights a deeper processing issue tied to syntactic expectation rather than lexical knowledge. These responses support the observation that learners in EFL contexts rely more heavily on explicit structural cues, and when ellipsis obscures those cues, comprehension often breaks down.

Table 1. Student Interpretation and Ellipsis Recovery Accuracy

Audio Segment	Student Interpretation	Recovered Ellipsis	Interpretation Accuracy
“You can, if —”	Literal pause	“if you try”	Incorrect
“She said she might...”	Thinks it means she refused	“might go”	Incorrect
“I was going to...”	Stops understanding	“was going to leave”	Partially correct
“They didn’t, so —”	Thinks it’s positive	“so we left”	Incorrect
“He told me to, but —”	Interpreted as directive	“but I didn’t”	Partially correct

Boundary Overrun and Comprehension Misalignment

Boundary overrun refers to spoken utterances that extend beyond their expected clause boundaries, often causing confusion for listeners about when a structural unit has ended. Drawing on intonation unit theory and the concept of prosodic phrasing (Funasaki & Yano, 2025), this analysis explores how mismatches between prosodic cues and syntactic closure generate interpretive ambiguity. In five recorded episodes, students consistently misinterpreted unfinished prosodic phrases as complete thoughts, leading to errors in comprehension. This misalignment disrupted the listeners’ chunking strategies, cognitive processes central to working memory during listening. Interview data confirmed that students heavily relied on falling intonation and pausing to segment meaning. However, with boundary overruns, these cues became unreliable and misleading. This issue proved especially critical in narrative contexts, where speakers often extend clause boundaries for stylistic emphasis or emotional buildup, further complicating the listener’s structural mapping.

In response to boundary overrun challenges, students expressed noticeable confusion in identifying where spoken clauses ended, revealing heavy reliance on prosodic cues like intonation and pauses. One student explained, “I thought the sentence was finished when the speaker said ‘She was tired,’ so I didn’t expect more information after that. When the next part came, I got lost.” This shows how boundary overruns caused premature interpretation, especially when intonation patterns falsely signaled closure. Another student shared, “In my mind, I always wait for a falling tone or a pause to understand that a sentence is done. But in the example ‘They said they were coming and —,’ I thought the message was positive, not that they actually didn’t come.” This misunderstanding reflects how mismatched prosody and syntactic structure disrupted the student’s real-time parsing. These interview responses underscore the finding that boundary overruns interfere with learners’ chunking strategies and create misalignment between what is heard and what is processed, particularly when intonation misleads rather than guides comprehension.

Table 2. Listener Interpretation of Clausal Boundaries

Transcript Segment	Clausal Expected	Boundary	Listener Assumption	Comprehension Result
"She was tired and she... she wanted –"	After 'tired'		Full stop	Misunderstood
"I thought he knew, but then..."	At comma		Resolution completed	Incomplete recall
"They said they were coming and – they didn't"	After "coming"		Agreement	Reversal misunderstood
"I don't think... it's fair"	After "think"		Sincere agreement	Conflict missed
"When he said he would –"	After "would"		Clausal wrap-up	Expectation mismatch

Disfluent Clause Markers and Interpretive Repositioning

Disfluent clause markers such as *um*, *you know*, and syntactic restarts disrupt clause mapping during real-time comprehension. Drawing on disfluency theory and decoding fluency framework (Jia et al., 2025), these markers compel listeners to temporarily suspend meaning construction and recalibrate their expectations. Analysis of five listening samples revealed that students frequently misattributed meaning to filled pauses, often interpreting them as transitional cues rather than signals of repair. This misinterpretation was especially pronounced when disfluency occurred after subordinators like *because* or *if*, which distorted the perceived causal or conditional relationship within the clause. In such cases, disfluency functioned as a pseudo-boundary marker to redirect listener attention while simultaneously introducing semantic noise.

Student interview responses revealed significant challenges in processing disfluent clause markers, particularly when such features disrupted clause cohesion and meaning construction. One student reflected, "When I heard 'Because, um, I think –', I wasn't sure what the speaker meant. I thought maybe the 'um' was part of the reason, so I waited, but the sentence felt broken." This response illustrates how filled pauses triggered confusion, especially when they appeared after subordinators, leading the student to misjudge the causal link in the clause. Another student shared, "The repetition in 'He, he said that –' made me think it was two different people. I couldn't tell who the speaker was referring to." This shows how syntactic restarts misdirected agent identification, a critical component in maintaining referential clarity. Both responses reflect the broader trend identified in the analysis: disfluent markers often caused interpretive repositioning, where listeners momentarily paused meaning construction and reprocessed incoming input with reduced accuracy.

Table 3. Student Interpretations of Disfluencies in Audio Segments

Audio Segment	Disfluency Type	Student Interpretation	Processing Effect
"Because, um, I think –"	Filled pause	Confusion on reason	Breakdown
"He, he said that –"	Restart	Repetition confused agent	Misdirected
"You know, if you – if you try..."	Restart and filled	Misread as hesitation	Delay
"Um, the thing is –"	Discourse preface	Treated as new clause	Error
"So, so I went –"	Repetition	Interpreted as emphasis	Partial success

Misaligned Pragmatic Inference from Hesitation Clusters

Hesitation clusters such as repeated pauses, fillers, and repair initiators often signal either cognitive effort or social sensitivity. However, these cues are frequently misinterpreted by listeners, especially in foreign-language contexts. Drawing on discourse marker theory and pragmatic competence (Rahardi & Noviance, 2025), this section examines how students infer speaker intention from such hesitation patterns. In five observed listening events, many students interpreted hesitations as signs of emotional uncertainty rather than as indicators of cognitive planning or structural search. This misalignment led to distorted inferences about the speaker's affective state or interpersonal stance. Pragmatically, hesitation can indicate politeness, caution, or syntactic processing rather than insecurity or doubt. When listeners fail to recognize these functions, their affective and interpersonal comprehension suffers. This highlights a key pedagogical implication: listening instruction must cultivate metapragmatic awareness to help learners decode intentional disfluency as part of communicative meaning.

In response to hesitation clusters during listening tasks, students revealed significant misalignments between pragmatic intention and perceived meaning. One student

commented, “When the speaker said, ‘Well, I guess, um... I mean —,’ I thought they were really nervous or didn’t believe what they were saying. It sounded like doubt.” This interpretation shows how hesitation was misread as emotional insecurity rather than a sign of cognitive processing or politeness. Another student reflected, “In the part where he said, ‘Maybe, just maybe, she —,’ I thought he was being sarcastic, like he didn’t really mean it,” demonstrating a misattribution of irony based solely on repeated hesitation. These responses illustrate how hesitation clusters were frequently interpreted as affective or interpersonal signals rather than structural or pragmatic features of spoken discourse. The students’ difficulty in identifying the communicative function of hesitation supports the study’s finding that foreign-language listeners often lack metapragmatic awareness, which leads to distorted inferences about speaker attitude, intention, or sincerity.

Table 4. Hesitation Clusters and Listener Inference Errors

Audio Segment	Hesitation Cluster	Listener Inference	Pragmatic Error Type
“Well, I guess, um... I mean —”	Filled and restart	Uncertainty	Emotion attribution
“So, uh, maybe he... didn’t?”	Filled pause	Weak certainty	Modality misread
“I’m not sure, I... um...”	Restart + delay	Speaker unsure	Misinterpreted intent
“He’s, uh, not really...”	Delay marker	Dislike assumption	Incorrect affect parsing
“Maybe, just maybe, she —”	Repetition	Sarcasm assumed	Irony false trigger

Clause Incompletion and Cognitive Closure Gaps

Incomplete clauses that end prematurely often leave listeners without semantic resolution, which directly impacts schema activation and memory retention. Drawing from schema theory and model of phonological closure processing (Paradita et al., 2025), this analysis explores how clause incompletion disrupts comprehension scaffolds. In five recorded listening instances, incomplete syntactic units led listeners to either overgeneralize or mentally fabricate plausible clause endings. These fabricated closures often resulted in the retention of false information, as evidenced in post-task reflections. The difficulty in distinguishing between intentional incompletion and accidental truncation exposes a critical gap in foreign language learners’ syntactic expectation norms. As a result, pedagogical practices should prioritize training in syntactic expectancy and the development of closure heuristics to support more sustained and accurate comprehension.

In response to challenges involving clause incompletion, students revealed significant gaps in achieving cognitive closure, often resulting in fabricated interpretations of what was said. One student reflected, “When I heard ‘If she had told me —,’ I just assumed it was something like an apology, so I added that meaning in my mind, even though it wasn’t there.” This illustrates how the absence of syntactic resolution led the student to overgeneralize based on personal expectation, not linguistic input. Another student noted, “In the part that said ‘You should really...’, I filled in my own idea like ‘try again’ because the sentence didn’t finish, and I needed it to make sense in my head.” This tendency to mentally complete unfinished structures highlights how clause incompletion disrupts schema activation and leads to the storage of incorrect information. These interview responses support the finding that learners frequently struggle to distinguish between speaker hesitation and true clause termination, underscoring the need for instructional focus on syntactic expectancy and closure prediction in listening comprehension.

Table 5. Transcript Recall and Retention Errors

Transcript Segment	Completion Expected	Student Response	Retention Effect
“If she had told me —”	Apodosis clause	Inferred apology	False addition
“When they — uh... they tried...”	Verb-object	Inserted own ending	Misremembered
“You should really...”	Infinitive verb	Guessed ‘try again’	Invented
“We didn’t think —”	Object clause	Assumed disbelief	Incorrect inference
“The reason was, um —”	Noun clause	Concluded ‘bad grade’	Fabricated content

Referential Ambiguity from Reduced Relative Clauses

Reduced relative clauses often trigger referential ambiguity, especially when learners misidentify subject-object relations due to the compressed syntactic structure. Drawing on theory of parsing efficiency and schema-based processing model (Goni-Cervera & Jacinto, 2024), this subsection examines five instances in which noun phrases containing embedded

reduced clauses were processed incorrectly. In these cases, learners commonly misinterpreted the modifier as part of the main clause or failed to connect it to its intended referent. As a result, the coherence of the overall narrative or descriptive listening task was compromised, particularly in situations where prosodic cues were either absent or misleading. The analysis indicates that learners tend to rely on linear decoding strategies rather than constructing a hierarchical syntactic map. This tendency often leads to inaccurate interpretation and flawed discourse representation.

Student interviews revealed that referential ambiguity caused by reduced relative clauses often led to misinterpretation and confusion during listening tasks. One student commented, “When I heard ‘The man arrested yesterday escaped,’ I thought ‘arrested’ was what he did, like he arrested someone. I didn’t know he was the one arrested.” This response reflects a misidentification of grammatical roles due to reliance on linear decoding, where the reduced clause was mistakenly processed as the main action. Another student noted, “When I heard ‘The car parked outside is mine,’ I first thought ‘parked’ was the main verb, like someone was parking it. I didn’t connect it back to describe the car.” This interpretation error illustrates how the absence of explicit relative markers and limited prosodic guidance contributed to syntactic misalignment. Both responses highlight how learners’ failure to recognize the hierarchical structure of reduced clauses often disrupted discourse coherence and led to flawed mental representations of the spoken content.

Table 6. Misinterpretation of Reduced Clauses in Audio Segments

Audio Segment	Clause Type	Misinterpretation	Comprehension Breakdown
“The man arrested yesterday escaped.”	Reduced relative	Thought ‘arrested’ is verb	Role confusion
“A girl chosen by the team won.”	Passive reduced	Interpreted ‘chosen’ as verb	Subject misidentified
“The car parked outside is mine.”	Past participle	‘Parked’ seen as predicate	Clause division error
“Students failing the test...”	Present participle	‘Failing’ seen as main verb	Misfocused
“The letter sent last week...”	Passive reduced	Thought it was main verb	Incomplete inference

The Role of Backchannel Minimal Responses in Misleading Semantic Expectations

Backchannel cues such as “uh-huh,” “yeah,” and “right” function as conversational signals of attention or agreement. However, in foreign-language listening, these are often misread as carrying semantic weight. Drawing on conversation analysis and pragmalinguistic framework (Abbasovna, 2025), this section shows how learners frequently interpreted minimal responses as turn-holding or topic-confirming devices. This misreading led to confusion about the speaker’s informational intent, often triggering premature conclusions or incorrect lexical anticipations. Such cases reveal that pragmatic listening relies heavily on culturally specific discourse norms: norms that are rarely made explicit in EFL instruction. Therefore, incorporating backchannel decoding into listening pedagogy can help learners build greater resilience when processing non-referential fillers and ambiguous conversational signals.

Student interview responses revealed how backchannel minimal responses such as “uh-huh” and “yeah” often triggered misinterpretation during listening, leading to semantic confusion. One student reflected, “When I heard ‘So he went there, yeah —,’ I thought the story was finished. I stopped paying attention because I believed the ‘yeah’ meant it was the end.” This premature conclusion illustrates how minimal responses were mistaken for discourse closure, disrupting the listener’s engagement with subsequent content. Another student noted, “In ‘She said — uh-huh — it was late,’ I assumed they both agreed, but I didn’t realize it was just a sign of listening, not real agreement.” This response shows how pragmatic misunderstanding of backchannels can alter the perceived meaning of a statement. These examples confirm that learners often assign semantic weight to non-referential cues, reflecting a gap in awareness of pragmatic norms, which are rarely addressed in traditional EFL listening instruction.

Table 7. Misinterpretations Caused by Backchannel Cues

Segment	Backchannel Cue	Listener Assumption	Resulting Error
"So he went there, yeah –"	"yeah"	Thought story ended	Truncated listening
"She said – uh-huh – it was late"	"uh-huh"	Assumed agreement	False interpretation
"They were like – right – and then they left"	"right"	Interpreted as approval	Skipped details
"It was scary, yeah"	"yeah"	Took as emphasis	Emotional distortion
"I told her – uh-huh – she couldn't"	"uh-huh"	Missed negation	Reversal error

Delayed Anaphora Resolution in Multi-Clause Listening Units

Anaphoric referencing becomes problematic when referents span multiple clauses, particularly under cognitive load. Drawing on discourse coherence model and construction-integration theory (Badio, 2024), this analysis examines how listeners handle delayed resolution of pronouns or definite noun phrases in extended listening units. The data reveal that students frequently postpone integrating antecedents, which results in pronoun misidentification or interpretive drift. This delay increases cognitive effort and contributes to memory overload, especially in narrative texts where referents are embedded across multiple discourse turns. These findings underscore the importance of explicit training in referential tracking and decoding clause cohesion during listening tasks.

Student responses revealed significant difficulties in resolving delayed anaphora during multi-clause listening tasks, especially when referents were not immediately accessible. One student noted, "When I heard 'He told her before she knew it,' I thought 'it' was about time, like something happened late; but later I realized it was about the information he gave," highlighting how temporal assumptions often override syntactic tracking under pressure. Another student shared, "In 'The boys helped the girls, and they cheered,' I thought 'they' meant the girls because they were helped; but it was actually the boys who cheered," reflecting confusion when plural referents compete across adjacent clauses. These responses demonstrate how delayed anaphora resolution causes interpretive drift, particularly when working memory is taxed. The findings reinforce the need for explicit instruction in referent tracking and cohesion awareness, as students often misattribute pronouns and linking phrases when discourse connections span beyond single-clause boundaries.

Table 8. Examples of Anaphora Misinterpretation and Breakdown Types

Segment	Anaphor	Misidentified Referent	Breakdown Type
"He told her before she knew it –"	"it"	Time instead of fact	Temporal mislink
"The boys helped the girls, and they cheered –"	"they"	Girls misattributed	Group confusion
"She opened the letter. It shocked her."	"it"	Letter unclear	Object ambiguity
"The students read the book, which surprised the teacher."	"which"	Mislinked to students	Clause misalignment
"He liked the show. This amazed his friends."	"this"	Unclear reference	Generalization error

Incongruent Tense Signaling and Chronological Disjunctions

Tense inconsistency in listening texts often causes confusion about the sequencing of events. Drawing on tense-aspect grammar and listening sequence schemata (Mealings et al., 2025), this data analyzes how sudden shifts from past to present within narratives or explanations can disrupt learners' ability to maintain coherent timelines. Many students failed to update their mental models when tense changes occurred, which led to reversed causal interpretations or the mistaken assumption that events were happening simultaneously. This problem was further amplified when temporal adverbials such as "then," "just," or "already" appeared in ambiguous contexts. To address this, instructional design should explicitly foreground strategies for realigning tense and aspect, especially in fast-paced or structurally compressed listening texts.

Student interview responses highlighted the confusion caused by sudden tense shifts during listening tasks, particularly when narrative sequencing was unclear. One student reflected, "When I heard 'He was walking when suddenly he runs,' I thought both actions were happening at the same time. I didn't realize the change in tense meant a shift in time or focus." This indicates a failure to update the mental timeline, resulting in a distorted

interpretation of the sequence. Another student shared, “In the sentence ‘They just left, and now he sees—,’ I got confused whether everything happened together or one after another. The word ‘now’ made it feel like the past event was still going.” These insights illustrate how incongruent tense signaling, especially when paired with ambiguous temporal adverbials, disrupted students’ ability to build coherent event structures. Such confusion underscores the importance of helping learners track tense-aspect shifts and reorganize chronological expectations during real-time listening.

Table 9. Common Tense Shifts and Temporal Misinterpretations

Segment	Tense Shift	Student Misinterpretation	Timeline Distortion
“He was walking when suddenly he runs—”	Past to present	Parallel action	Temporal clash
“They just left, and now he sees—”	Past to present	Simultaneous view	Sequence reversal
“I thought it ended, but it’s starting—”	Past to present	Restart confusion	Event loop
“He told me, she tells me—”	Past to present	Double time	Mixed frame
“He liked it, and he likes it still—”	Past to present	Ongoing state misread	Continuity error

Overgeneralization of Filler Lexis as Thematic Keywords

Students often overgeneralize the importance of frequently repeated filler lexis such as “thing,” “stuff,” and “kind of” by treating them as thematic signals. Drawing on corpus-informed lexical patterning and thematic inference theory (Kochkorova, 2025), this section analyzes five examples in which students elevated non-content lexical items as thematic anchors. This overgeneralization frequently resulted in distorted summary tasks or inaccurate keyword extraction during comprehension checks. The analysis highlights a gap in learners’ ability to distinguish between high-frequency functional words and truly referential lexical items. To address this interference, explicit instruction in recognizing lexical prominence and thematic relevance is essential.

Student interview responses revealed how the overgeneralization of filler lexis distorted their comprehension of thematic content. One student reflected, “When I heard the speaker say ‘the thing was, like, weird,’ I thought ‘thing’ was the main idea, so I focused on that in my summary. But then I realized it wasn’t really important.” This indicates a tendency to assign thematic weight to vague placeholders, leading to inaccurate interpretations. Another student admitted, “I usually think words like ‘kind of’ or ‘stuff’ mean something important is coming, so I write them as keywords. But sometimes they don’t mean much, and my answers are off.” This response illustrates how learners mistakenly treat high-frequency functional lexis as referential content, resulting in flawed thematic inference. These responses support the finding that students often conflate filler words with key ideas, highlighting the need for clearer instruction on distinguishing lexical prominence from thematic relevance in spoken English.

Table 10. Filler Lexis and Listening Misinterpretations

Segment	Filler Lexis	Misassigned Theme	Listening Consequence
“The thing was, like, weird—”	“thing”	Main idea	Vague recall
“It was kind of amazing”	“kind of”	Core modifier	Weak summary
“They had stuff to say”	“stuff”	Main event	False keyword
“It’s this thing they do”	“thing”	Concept marker	Misinterpreted genre
“That sort of made it different”	“sort of”	Causal inference	Overstated cause

Discussion

Listening comprehension is no longer adequately understood as the linear decoding of surface-level words. Instead, it must be reconceptualized as an intricate, real-time negotiation of structural, cognitive, and pragmatic ambiguity. As the findings reveal, ellipsis repair demands syntactic inferencing that goes well beyond vocabulary recognition. This supports Mealings’s et al. (2025) assertion that comprehension is fundamentally inferential and schema-driven. When foreign-language learners encounter truncated clauses, especially in spontaneous, unscripted speech; they often misattribute the speaker’s intent or prematurely abandon interpretation. This pattern highlights a critical mismatch between the linguistic economy characteristic of native speaker production and the cognitive processing capacity of second-language learners.

Boundary overrun, as shown in the data, further disrupts coherence-building by violating learners' expectations of alignment between prosodic cues and syntactic closure. This observation resonates with Artuso's et al. (2025) theory that spoken language is structured into intonation units, which listeners rely on to anticipate grammatical boundaries. However, the Indonesian learner data suggest that when prosodic cues contradict syntactic finality, particularly in narratives or dialogic turns, comprehension frequently stalls. These mismatches demonstrate the need to re-theorize listening as an interface between acoustic segmentation and syntactic reconstruction, a conceptual gap rarely addressed in conventional EFL listening instruction.

Disfluent clause markers, in parallel, expose how listeners misinterpret pauses, repetitions, or self-repairs as indicators of propositional content. Siegel et al. (2025) argue that disfluencies often signal planning or hesitation rather than semantic breaks. Yet many EFL learners, especially in classroom contexts, overread these markers as meaningful syntactic cues. In the Indonesian data, expressions such as "um," "you know," and restarts following conjunctions frequently confuse learners about logical relations, especially when dealing with causal, concessive, or contrastive sequences. This confusion indicates a pressing need to incorporate disfluency literacy into listening pedagogy and training learners to recognize such features as metacognitive traces of speech planning, rather than interpretive anchors.

Taken together, the three discourse phenomena such as ellipsis repair, boundary overrun, and disfluent clause markers demonstrate that listening comprehension, particularly under disfluent or high-speed conditions, requires more than accurate recall or grammar decoding. It involves adaptive, multi-level processing across syntax, prosody, and real-time inference. As Rungsinanont (2024) argues, real-time listening is inherently messy and it requires continuous revision of understanding based on fragmentary or ambiguous input. In the Indonesian EFL context, where listening activities are often teacher-controlled and text-dependent, these challenges are intensified by the absence of exposure to unstructured, prosodically irregular, and repair-laden speech. Consequently, EFL listening instruction must be reimagined not as a question-answering task, but as cognitive training in managing incompleteness, resolving ambiguity, and tolerating disfluency as an ordinary part of meaning-making.

The three phenomena such as ellipsis repair, boundary overrun, and disfluent clause markers offer distinct pedagogical trajectories. Ellipsis repair necessitates explicit training in clause completion strategies, helping learners anticipate and reconstruct missing syntactic elements. Boundary overrun, by contrast, suggests the need to teach learners how to separate prosody from grammatical structure, recognizing that a falling intonation does not always mark the end of a clause. Disfluent clause markers, such as "uh," "I mean," or "you know," require familiarity with their discourse-pragmatic functions rather than treating them as meaningless interruptions. Without pedagogical intervention in these areas, comprehension failures are unlikely to be random; rather, they become structurally patterned and predictable.

Redefining listening comprehension, then, involves foregrounding these patterns not as anomalies but as teachable constructs. These features must be embedded within authentic and unsimplified audio materials, not artificially clean texts that omit the very elements that challenge comprehension. As listening plays an increasingly central role in both English language assessment and real-world communication, equipping learners with strategies to decode disfluency and tolerate ambiguity must become a foundational instructional goal. This redefinition aligns with contemporary sociocognitive models of listening, such as proposed by Ngonkum & Kisawadkorn (2024), which frame comprehension as a co-constructed act. In such models, understanding is negotiated moment by moment, not passively received. This view also resonates with Jia's et al. (2025) postmethod pedagogy, which calls for localized responsiveness and instruction grounded in authentic discourse realities. In the Indonesian EFL context where scripted listening materials dominate and spontaneous speech remains underrepresented, pedagogical reform must move beyond comprehension checks. It should cultivate listening resilience, the ability to manage ambiguity, and skills in discourse-level decoding.

The findings of this study do not support the call for more repetitive listening drills. Instead, they advocate for more varied instructional designs grounded in the realities of natural speech: real disfluencies, genuine ellipsis, and structurally irregular clause boundaries. Future research should investigate how sustained exposure to naturally disfluent speech influences learners' long-term inferential processing, particularly in relation to ellipsis recovery across varying proficiency levels. Exploring cross-modal listening interventions such as those that integrate visual prosodic cues with clause-boundary prediction may enhance learners' comprehension resilience in complex listening conditions. Finally, the development of corpus-informed pedagogical models centered on structural ambiguity, real-time disfluency decoding, and prosodic misalignment constitutes a critical next step for advancing listening instruction in Indonesian EFL classrooms.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has redefined English listening comprehension in the Indonesian EFL context by foregrounding the interpretive burdens posed by ellipsis repair, boundary overrun, and disfluent clause markers: features often overlooked in conventional pedagogical design. Through discourse-based analysis of authentic listening data, it has shown that comprehension breakdowns are not random or incidental. Instead, they are structurally traceable and demand pedagogical responses rooted in real-time syntactic and prosodic negotiation. Nonetheless, a key limitation of this study lies in its contextual focus. The data were drawn primarily from upper-secondary learners in teacher-controlled classroom environments, which may not fully capture the dynamics of informal, peer-based interactions or those found at other educational levels, such as primary or tertiary settings. Furthermore, the study did not engage deeply with the multimodal dimensions of listening comprehension such as gesture, gaze, or spatial context that often scaffold understanding in natural conversations. Future research should address these gaps by expanding the ecological validity of listening tasks. This includes incorporating peer-led, multimodal listening scenarios, longitudinal studies that track learner adaptability over time, and cross-level comparisons that involve both early-stage and adult learners. Despite these limitations, the study offers a crucial contribution. It shifts the emphasis in EFL listening instruction from textual fidelity where learners are trained to retrieve exact wording toward interpretive resilience, where the focus is on negotiating meaning amid ambiguity, disfluency, and incomplete input. By revealing the cognitive and structural roots of comprehension failure, the study calls for a reconceptualization of listening pedagogy: one that embraces the temporal, syntactic, and interactional complexities of real-world English use.

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