

## MUTILATED TRANSCRIPTIONS: AN EFFECTIVE AID FOR INCREASING LOW-ACHIEVERS' LISTENING COMPREHENSION

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### Abstract

Listening is an important skill, yet it is very demanding and challenging for the learners to master. Mostly, there is a huge gap between the needs of the learners and their real ability. The present study compared the effects of three kinds of instruction directed at listening comprehension for low-achievers. Three parallel homogeneous groups of learners were exposed to three different conditions of presenting listening skill. In the first group, language learners were presented by c-tests, cloze tests, and mutilated transcriptions (blanks were not based on c-test or cloze test rules but problematic words). The second group benefited the oral elicitation and the third group was provided multiple-choice items to check their comprehension. The obtained data from a pre-test and a post-test subjected to one-way ANOVA showed that students who enjoyed 'mutilated transcriptions treatment' outperformed the other groups. Moreover, the second group which benefited oral elicitation outperformed the third group. As a secondary goal of the research the statistics showed that the first group outperformed the other two groups in incidental vocabulary learning.

**Keywords:** Mutilated transcriptions, C-test, Cloze test, teaching listening.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Listening Comprehension as a well-recognized dimension in language learning is a very important skill which students need to learn and practice. In many language classrooms, however, listening comprehension is not the priority for both language teachers and language learners. We must always keep in our mind that "Speaking does not of itself constitute communication unless what is said is comprehended by another person" (Morley, 1991, p. 82). In fact, this clearly states the importance of listening comprehension, and implies that teachers need to allocate a considerable amount of classroom time to teaching and practicing it.

Nunan (1999, p. 25) puts into words that "successful listeners use both bottom-up and top-down strategies". In a top-down processing, just hearing the first part of the sentence, will automatically make us use our pool of knowledge to think about and to predict what the rest of the sentence might be. In contrast, bottom-up processing involves building meaning from the sounds we hear. We change the sounds into words, then into grammatical relationships till we arrive at a meaning. When we listen, bottom-up and top-down processes interact and this interaction leads to a better understanding (Peterson, 1991). Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that teachers need to take both skills into account during their lesson plan phase.

I'd like to explore the idea that listening exercises are most effective if they are constructed in a way which can change the tasks to a game or a puzzle. This seems really helpful for low-achievers as they have little motivation and confidence in listening courses. Mutilated texts or c-test and cloze tests present and provide some of the information for language learners, so they do not get lost in the process of comprehension. The provided texts will help them to integrate top-down and bottom-up processes and give them the idea that they can understand something about the text.

The type of materials we use to teach listening comprehension is of a great importance. Unfortunately for our students, many textbooks contain artificial dialogues which have literally no resemblance to real speech (Richards, 1983). It seems obvious that these students are likely to have significant problems when they finally encounter real language. Porter and Roberts (1981, p. 179) warn us that "we cannot expect learners to handle types of language they have never, or hardly ever been exposed to". While it would be nice if we could only use authentic listening materials in the classroom, we need to remember that lower-level students and low-achiever students may find such materials difficult, overwhelming, or discouraging. One way to approach this is to use mutilated materials which are very close to real English, but take into account some of the weaknesses or problems that learners at that level are likely to have (Richards 1983; Ur, 1984). Since the learners are provided with some parts of the material, they are encouraged to listen more attentively. As the by-product of teaching listening comprehension language learners may benefit some incidental vocabulary learning. Vocabulary is learned either incidentally or intentionally (Ellis, 1997). Richards et al. (1992) refer to incidental vocabulary learning as the flood of vocabulary around learners. They maintain that learners are passive in incidental vocabulary learning while their lexicon is enhanced unconsciously since words are learned while learners are engaged in some other activities such as reading or conversation. In other words, incidental vocabulary learning is considered as a by-product of learners' involvement in other activities.

Considering the importance of listening comprehension in language learning and helping low-achievers to progress in their journey of learning, the present study strives to investigate the following **research questions**:

1. Do Iranian listening comprehensions low-achievers provided by c-tests, cloze tests, and mutilated transcriptions outperform listening comprehension low-achievers who are not provided with any textual context in vocabulary learning?
2. Do Iranian listening comprehension low-achievers benefited the oral elicitation outperform listening comprehension low-achievers who are provided multiple-choice items to check their comprehension.
3. Do Iranian listening comprehensions low-achievers provided by c-tests, cloze tests, and mutilated transcriptions outperform listening comprehension low-achievers who are not provided with any textual context in vocabulary learning?

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Participants**

The participants of the present study were 90 freshmen male and female students studying "Teaching English as a Foreign Language" at Sari Azad University with Persian language background. Their ages ranged from 18 to 28. They were randomly selected from a sample of 127 subjects who took part in a TOEFL (2005 version) test which was administered to ensure the homogeneity of the subjects. According to the result of their TOEFL test, the subjects were divided into three groups and each group consisted of 30 subjects.

### **2.2 Instrumentation**

The instruments employed to serve the purposes of the present research were (a) a Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) (2005 Version), (b) A teacher made listening comprehension test used as pre-

test and post-test (c) a paper and pencil vocabulary test, and (d) a thirty-item multiple-choice researcher-made vocabulary test. Further information about the instruments is provided below:

The TOEFL test (2005 version), which was administered as a proficiency test, enjoyed the internal consistency measure (KR-21) of 0.86.

The estimated internal consistency measure (KR-21) of the teacher-made listening comprehension test was computed as 0.81.

The paper and pencil vocabulary test comprised 55 words. The purpose of this test was to ensure that the subjects were not familiar with any given word which was going to be appeared in the listening materials. Therefore, the reliability and validity of this test was not considered necessary. As a result of the administration of the test 15 words which were known by almost all subjects were deleted.

The fourth instrument was a thirty-item multiple-choice vocabulary test devised for the purposes of this study which was administered as a vocabulary learning test along with the final listening comprehension test. To ensure the reliability of the test it was administered to a pilot group. Many scholars such as Henning (1987) and Bachman (1990) have stated that the reliability coefficient beyond 0.60 is acceptable. Therefore, the estimated internal consistency measure (KR-21) of the test which was calculated as 0.69 indicated that it enjoyed an acceptable reliability value. To establish the empirical validity of the test, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient between this test and the TOEFL test was calculated as 0.81.

## 2.3 Procedure

*Step 1:* After the administration of the TOEFL test to homogenize the participants in order to have reliable results, the pre-listening test was administered to the groups to measure their listening comprehension ability at the beginning of the treatment. Moreover, the paper and pencil vocabulary test was administered to all three groups. 55 new words were included in the test and the examinees were asked to provide the meaning of each word by choosing a variety of ways such as using definitions, synonyms, antonyms, sentences, and pictures. They were even allowed to use their mother tongue and were assured that spelling was not going to count against their scores as long as the scorer could read the intended word. Since English words may have more than one meaning and can serve different parts of speech, to be more accurate, subjects were also asked to write all the possible meanings of the given words they knew. This test led to the deletion of 15 words. Finally, 40 words that almost none of the students knew were selected for the main experiment.

*Step 2:* The treatment was given to the groups: in the first group, language learners were presented by c-tests, cloze tests, and mutilated transcriptions. The second group benefited the oral elicitation and the third group was provided multiple-choice items to check their comprehension. The same material was presented to the groups regarding the authenticity and vocabulary. The treatment lasted over 12 sessions.

*Step 3:* The same teacher-made listening comprehension test administered again as the post-test to investigate the probable effectiveness of the treatment.

*Step 4:* The thirty-item multiple choice vocabulary test was administered to all three groups to investigate the examinees' performance in incidental vocabulary learning.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After administration of the TOEFL test, those participants who scored within the range of one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected for the main study. The results of statistical analysis run on the pre-test listening scores revealed almost similar performance among three groups as illustrated in table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for pre-test

Statistical data	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
No. of Subjects	30	30	30
Mean	19.06	18.58	18.23
Variance	5.33	4.16	2.75
SD	2.31	2.04	1.66

To make sure that there is no significant difference among the means of the three groups, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was also administered. Since the Sig = p-value = 0.237 > 0.05 =  $\alpha$ , and the amount of

mean square between groups and within groups do not show significant difference, the null hypothesis ( $H_0 = G_1 = G_2 = G_3$ ) cannot be rejected. Table (2) displays the statistical analysis for ANOVA administered on the pre-test scores.

Table 2. One-way ANOVA for the pre-test among the three groups

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	12.022	2	6.011	1.465	.237
Within Groups	356.967	87	4.103		
Total	368.989	89			

Analyzing the data of the post-test for the first group presented by c-tests, cloze tests, and mutilated transcriptions ( $M = 32.20$ ,  $SD = 3.64$ ), the second group benefited the oral elicitation ( $M = 28.16$ ,  $SD = 3.11$ ), and the third group provided with multiple-choice items to check their comprehension ( $M = 23.17$ ,  $SD = 2.21$ ), indicated dissimilar performance among the language learners.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for post-test

Statistical data	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Number of subjects	30	30	30
Mean	32.20	28.16	23.17
Variance	13.93	10.03	4.64
SD	3.64	3.11	2.21

To make sure that there was a significant difference among the means of the three groups, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was also administered. Since the  $Sig = p\text{-value} = 0.000 < 0.05 = \alpha$ , and the amount of mean square between groups and within groups denotes a significant difference, the null hypothesis ( $H_0 = m_1 = m_2 = m_3$ ) can be easily rejected. This marked difference points the impact of the first kind of treatment employed in the study. Table (4) presents the statistical analysis for ANOVA run on the post-test scores.

Table 4. One-way ANOVA for the post-test among the three groups

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	734.822	2	364.411	30.199	.000
Within Groups	1058.467	87	12.166		
Total	1793.289	89			

Test of homogeneity of variances revealed that variance of the scores in the groups are significantly different. P-value = 0.007 = Sig <  $\alpha$  as shown in Table 5. Thus, for further statistical analysis, equal variance is not assumed. Since the population of the groups is equal, the value of F resists the effect of unequal variance. To make sure that the groups were statistically different, Games-Howell's test was also used.

Table 5. Test of homogeneity of variances

Levene Statistics	Df1	Df2	Sig
4.986	2	87	.007

To find the differences between groups a post hoc test was run. Table (6) shows the post-hoc analysis of the post test. The p-value is smaller than the alpha level between the first group and the second group) meaning that there is a statistically significant difference between the performances of the two groups and subjects. The first group provided by mutilated texts outperformed the second group who were provided by oral elicitation. The p-value for the comparison between the first and the third group is smaller than the alpha level, meaning that there is a statistically significant difference between the performances of the two groups and subjects.

Table 6. Post-hoc analysis on the post-test scores

Dependent Variable: scores							
	(I) groups	(J) groups	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Tukey HSD	G1	G2	2.90000*	.79529	.001	1.0036	4.7964
		G3	6.90000*	.79529	.000	5.0036	8.7964
	G2	G1	-2.90000*	.79529	.001	-4.7964	-1.0036
		G3	4.00000*	.79529	.000	2.1036	5.8964
	G3	G1	-6.90000*	.79529	.000	-8.7964	-5.0036
		G2	-4.00000*	.79529	.000	-5.8964	-2.1036
Games-Howell	G1	G2	2.90000*	.90153	.006	.7302	5.0698
		G3	6.90000*	.77689	.000	5.0165	8.7835
	G2	G1	-2.90000*	.90153	.006	-5.0698	-.7302
		G3	4.00000*	.69365	.000	2.3233	5.6767
	G3	G1	-6.90000*	.77689	.000	-8.7835	-5.0165
		G2	-4.00000*	.69365	.000	-5.6767	-2.3233

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The P-value between the second and third group is also smaller than the alpha, meaning that there is a statistically significant difference between the performances of the two groups. The second group provided with oral elicitation outperformed the third group.

In order to analyze which of the three treatments lead to better vocabulary learning one-way ANOVA was administered.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics for incidental vocabulary learning among the three groups

Statistical data	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
No. of questions	30	30	30
Mean	23.20	12.50	6.33
Variance	4.93	7.16	.75
SD	2.54	2.98	1.06

Table 8. One-way ANOVA for the incidental vocabulary learning among the three groups

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	634.822	2	394.441	28.109	.000
Within Groups	1158.467	87	12.146		
Total	1793.289	89			

Test of homogeneity of variances revealed that variance of the scores in the groups are significantly different. P-value = 0.009 = Sig <  $\alpha$  as shown in Table 8. Thus, for further statistical analysis, equal variance is not assumed. Since the population of the groups is equal, the value of F resists the effect of unequal variance. To make sure that the groups were statistically different, Games-Howell's test was also used.

Table 9. Test of homogeneity of variances

Levene Statistics	Df1	Df2	Sig
3.996	2	87	.008

To find the differences between groups a post hoc test was run. Table (10) shows the post-hoc analysis of the incidental vocabulary learning. The p-value is smaller than the alpha level between the first group and the second group meaning that there is a statistically significant difference between the performances of the two groups and subjects. The first group benefited by mutilated texts outperformed the second group.

Table 10. Post-hoc analysis on the incidental vocabulary learning

Dependent Variable: scores							
	(I) groups	(J) groups	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Tukey HSD	G1	G2	1.90000*	.77229	.001	1.0026	4.7464
		G3	7.90000*	.77229	.000	5.0836	8.7543
	G2	G1	-1.90000*	.77229	.001	-4.7098	-1.0346
		G3	4.00000*	.77229	.000	2.1236	5.5464
	G3	G1	-7.90000*	.77229	.000	-8.0864	-5.0052
		G2	-4.00000*	.77229	.000	-5.5414	-2.1008
Games-Howell	G1	G2	1.90000*	.91153	.007	.7122	5.7698
		G3	7.90000*	.77689	.000	5.8965	8.4535
	G2	G1	-1.90000*	.91153	.007	-5.0378	-.7902
		G3	4.00000*	.69365	.000	2.3158	5.6767
	G3	G1	-7.90000*	.77689	.000	-8.7675	-5.7645
		G2	-4.00000*	.69365	.000	-5.6757	-2.1133

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The P-value between the second and third group is also smaller than the alpha, meaning that there is a statistically significant difference between the performances of the two groups. The second group provided with oral elicitation outperformed the third group.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

To provide low-achievers of listening comprehension with an effective kind of listening material and treatment, this study investigated the effect of three different conditions of presenting listening skill. The three groups were provided with mutilated transcriptions, oral elicitation, and multiple-choice items to check their comprehension. As a secondary goal of the research, incidental vocabulary learning was also checked throughout the three different groups.

Regarding the first research question, the results of the study indicate that the students benefited the mutilated texts, c-test and cloze test performed better than the low-achievers who were not provided with any transcription.

The interpretation of the results of data analysis regarding the second research question revealed that the students treated by the oral elicitation outperformed listening comprehension low-achievers who were provided multiple-choice items to check their comprehension.

Regarding the third research questions, the analysis of the results revealed that Iranian listening comprehension low-achievers provided by c-tests, cloze tests, and mutilated transcriptions outperformed listening comprehension low-achievers who were not provided with any type of observable transcription in vocabulary learning.

In line with what Thornbury (2004), and Klein-Braley and Raatz (1984), proposed, EFL teachers may use mutilated texts as an effective teaching tool. Reconstructing the mutilated texts is much more like doing a puzzle. It is like playing a game and this fact by no means is a pitfall. Mutilated texts and c-test and cloze test help listening low-achievers' mind engages in the activity. The provided transcribed sentences help them not lose in the flow of speech. Moreover, contextualization is one of the most effective factors that influences teaching and learning the vocabulary of a language. It helps learners to facilitate their learning by developing semantic networks and other kinds of association links (Hunt and Beglar, 2005; Hedge, 2008). The students who were provided with the visible and available transcriptions performed much better than the other two groups.

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