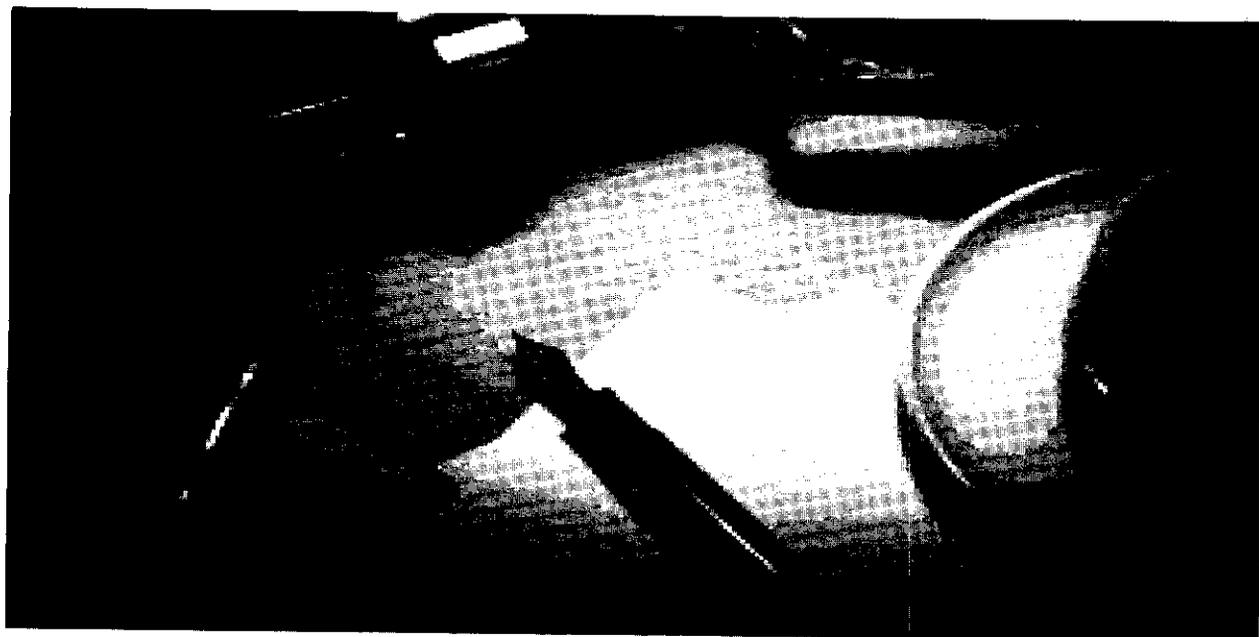


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Comparing the mean scores of all eight groups, one can conclude that Group B-a ($X=3.84$), the subjects who had the topics of their interest through dicto-comp, improved their listening comprehension more than the other groups. The next group who performed better than others was Group A-a, consisting of those who practiced standard dictation on topics of their interest. Groups B-a, D-a, and A-b performed equally well. The mean scores of Group C-b and C-a was low and nearly similar to each other ($X=2.10$; $X=2.50$), and the least mean scores belonged to Group D-b ($X=1.80$), the control group who listened to the topics in which they had no particular interest.

The comparison of the mean of gain scores of the three experimental groups rejected the third null hypothesis, stating that there is no difference between the performances of different experimental groups in the improvement of listening comprehension. The results showed that dicto-comp is more effective than trans-dictation and standard dictation. The results of this part support the idea proposed by Celce-Murcia and McIntosh (1981) who believe that teachers who want to provide the most effective listening experience for their students should use dicto-comp.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to find out whether listening to passages of which the topics were interesting to the students and practicing them through different dictation methods could be helpful for the improvement of the Iranian students' listening comprehension.

For this purpose, a pre-test was administered at the beginning of the instruction. Then the subjects were categorized into two major groups. Half of them listened to passages with the topics of their interest, and the other half

listened to the passages with no particular interest in the topics. The type of activity the subjects were involved in while listening was another factor focused in this study. As far as dictation practice was concerned, the subjects were put in four classes, and each of them took part in a certain dictation activity except the fourth group who were the control group and had no dictations. The students of each group were divided into two sections, one listened to topics of their interest and the other had no interest in the topics they listened to. All eight groups were instructed for one and a half months.

At the end of instruction, a post-test of listening was administered, and the students' gain scores were computed. The statistical procedures involved a two-way analysis of variance and two scheffe tests. The two way ANOVA was employed to determine the effect of both dictation and topic interest on the students' gain scores. The scheffe tests were used to see if there is any significant difference between the performances of experimental groups having different dictation practices.

To sum up, the results of the present study provided strong evidence that the type of dictation the students take while listening, and the degree of improvement of students' understanding of the spoken language are closely related. Besides, the findings of the present study indicate that topic interest plays a vital role in the betterment of auditory comprehension.

Considering the performances of the subjects on listening comprehension gain scores, it can be concluded that those who practice their listening ability through dicto-comp, and listen to topics of their interest improve their understanding much better than the other groups.

Finally, at the end of the instruction, all the students received a post-test of listening comprehension which was actually the same as the pre-test, but the order with which the items appeared was changed.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

In order to compare the effect of the two variables, topic interest and dictation on the improvement of listening comprehension, a two-way analysis of variance was conducted on the students' gain scores (the difference between pre-test and post-test scores). The results of the two-way ANOVA indicated that topic interest had a significant effect on the improvement of listening. The fact that the value of observed F ratio (33.93) exceeded the value of critical Fratio (6.81) is a statistical indication of this gain. Also, the observed value of F for the effect of dictation on listening comprehension improvement, as can be seen in Table 1, was estimated to be 58.65. This is much greater than the critical value of F (6.81). However, the interaction of the factors did not yield a significant F ratio (.014), comparing to the critical value of F (6.81).

Table 1: Two-way ANOVA for determining the effect of topic interest and dictation on subjects' gain scores

Source of variance	Ss	df	MS	F
Main Effects	98.207	2	49.103	50.870
Topic Interest	32.756	1	32.756	33.935
Dictation	56.618	1	56.618	56.655
2 way interaction topic & dictation	0.13	1	0.13	0.14
Explained	108.551	3	36.184	37.486
Residual	169.887	176	.965	
Total	278.438	179	1.556	

The significance of F for the effect of dictation on listening comprehension improvement necessitated the application of scheffe test to locate the source of observed differences. The scheffe test demonstrated that the mean scores of the three experimental groups exceeded the mean score of the control group who had no dictation practices. In addition, comparing the mean scores of the three experimental groups, it

was concluded that Group B who received dicto-comp, achieved higher scores in the post-test than the other groups. The results also showed that there was no significant difference between the performance of the groups who practiced standard dictation and trans-dictation. So, the first null hypothesis, stating that dictation has no significant role in the improvement of listening comprehension was rejected. The results are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: The scheffe test for comparing the performances of different experimental groups and the control group

Mean	Group
1.511	Grp D
2.5667	Grp C*
2.7889	Grp A*
3.3000	Grp B**

In order to compare the improvement of all groups as far as the effect of both dictation practices and topic interest on listening comprehension was concerned, another scheffe test was applied to determine which group actually improved listening ability. So, the results of this part rejected the second null hypothesis, stating that there is no relationship between listening comprehension improvement and topic interest. The results are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: The scheffe test for comparing the performances of all groups

Mean	Group
1.800	Grp D-a
2.500	Grp C-a
2.1000	Grp C-b
2.3600	Grp A-b*
2.6250	Grp B-a*
2.8250	Grp D-a*
3.2500	Grp A-a**
3.8400	Grp B-a*****

topics of the same books with the same readability levels were chosen. The topics of these passages were not in accordance with the interest of the subjects.

8. In the last step, the subjects were divided into two groups: One group listened to the passages of their interests, and the other group listened to the passages in which they had no particular interest. Then, the second phase of the study was done as follows:

The passages which were already prepared for the first phase of the study included 100-150 words, and their difficulty level was determined. Therefore, they were suitable texts for dictation. Now, what remained to be done was the methods of dictating the materials to the subjects. To do so, all the subjects were grouped into four.

9. Group A was given standard dictation practice. The students listened to the tape first. Then, the passage was read to them through the tape chunk-by-chunk, and the students wrote what they could hear. In the third reading, the subjects were required to check their work. Group B was given a dicto-comp practice. The subjects listened to the tape and wrote down what they understood. Group C received a trans-dictation practice. Here again the subjects listened to the tape three times. First, they just listened to the passage. When the tape was played for the second time, there was a pause during which the subjects translated what they heard into Persian. Then, the students listened to the passage once more to check their work. Group D had no writing practice while they were listening to the passages. They were considered as the control group of the study.

It should be noted that the grouping of the subjects based on both topic interest and different dictation practices was done in the following manner:

A-a) 25 students received a standard dictation with topics of their interest.

A-b) 20 students received a standard dictation with topics in which they had no particular interest.

B-a) 20 students received a dicto-comp with topics of their interest.

B-b) 25 students received a dicto-comp with topics in which they had no particular interest.

C-a) 25 students received a trans-dictation with topics of their interest.

C-b) 20 students received a trans-dictation with topics in which they had no particular interest.

D-a) 25 students listened to topics of their interest without having any dictation.

D-b) 20 students listened to topics in which they had no particular interest, and they did not have any dictation.

Then, the above-mentioned eight groups were instructed for one and a half months. It was done in this way that the first six groups, considered as the experimental groups, had dictation practice in their listening class, the topics of which were either interesting or uninteresting to them. Each two groups had one type of dictation, for example, Group A-a and A-b had standard dictation, Group B-a and B-b had dicto-comp, and Group C-a and C-b had trans-dictation. The last two groups, considered as the control groups, listened to some passages without having any dictation activity.

On the other hand, to take the role of topic interest into account, both the experimental groups and the control group were classified into two, that is, those who listened to the passages with topics of their interest, and those who listened to the passages with topics in which they had no particular interest.

comprehension of Iranian students?

3- Is there any significant difference between the performances of three experimental groups taking standard dictation, trans-dictation, and dicto-comp?

Based on these questions, three null hypotheses were formulated.

Method

Subjects

The subjects of this study were 180 junior university students majoring in English translation. All of them had studied English at least two years at the university and four years at high school. All the subjects were at the same level of language proficiency as far as their language background was concerned.

Instrumentation

In order to measure the students' improvement in understanding English, two tests of listening comprehension were administered. The first test was Michigan test, and the other one was taken from Iran Language Center Listening Test. Of course, before the actual study began, both tests were given to 25 students majoring in English from University of Tehran. The comparison of their scores showed a high correlation between the two tests. So, the combination of these tests were used both in the pre-and the post-test.

Procedure

In the first phase of the study, the following steps were taken to answer the research questions:

1. Two tests of listening comprehension (One Michigan Test and the other Iran Language Center Listening Test), each containing 20

multiple choice comprehension questions, were administered to the subjects before the instruction as their pre-test.

2. The subjects were asked to write down the topics they were most interested in to listen.
3. The most frequent topics were picked out. They included 24 topics, such as traveling around the world, talking about historical events, giving scientific information, doing daily activities, explaining different hobbies, telling short stories, talking about nature and natural resources.
4. Following Stern's (1992) idea regarding the most interesting topics that the students are generally more willing to listen to, ten topics out of the twenty-four topics which were suggested by the students were chosen. From among the present topics, two most frequently-mentioned topics -- concerning daily activities and every day conversation were picked out.
5. Based on Finnochiaro and Bonomo (1973) who state that daily activities and every day conversation are usually about a limited number of topic such as cooking, eating, studying, and watching television, the above mentioned topics were grouped into ten sub-categories. Then the students were asked to arrange them according to their interests.
6. According to the students' classification of different types of every day activities, those put by the students as their first three choices were selected.
7. The readability of the Michigan Test and Iran language Center Listening Test was computed through the readability formula (Farhady et al., 1995). Then seven passages with the same degree of difficulty as the tests on three most interesting topics were chosen from American Language Course and Welcome to English, Book 3. Seven other

Farhady, Jafarpoor, and Birjandi (1995) categorize dictation into five groups, including standard dictation, partial dictation, elicited imitation, dicto-comp, and dictation with competing noise. Standard dictation, the most frequent type, is defined as a passage of appropriate length and difficulty. The passage is read, and students are required to write down what they hear. It is read three times. First the students get the general idea of the passage. Then, they hear the passage in chunks and write down what they get. The third reading is performed to let students check their own performances. In partial dictation, a passage with some deletions is given, and then it is read completely. The students listen and fill in the deleted parts. In elicited imitation, the students listen and imitate what they heard. Dicto-comp is used when students listen to a passage and write down what they have comprehended. In dictation with competing noise, students hear the materials while there is an extra noise in the background. The subjects are expected to understand the passage.

In addition to the dictation types mentioned, another kind of dictation has been identified – trans-dictation. In trans-dictation, a passage is read aloud, and the students translate the passage in their mother tongues.

Another factor to consider in understanding the spoken language is topic interest. According to Stern (1992), topic is the content or the situation in which the language occurs. Bachman (1995) expresses that the topic of a given piece of discourse is generally understood as what it is about. It is the subject matter of the discourse. Felix (1997) convincingly shows that a learner who is forced to focus on an unfamiliar topic in second language may produce disjointed and more inaccurate forms than when dealing with

familiar and interesting topics. In this regard, Richards (1990) points out that the way topics are selected constitutes an important dimension of language comprehension. In the same view, Stern (1992) states that for most learners it is important to work on the topics they are interested in.

As Chastain (1988) states, one of the most important responsibilities of the teacher is to arouse the students' interest in the content of the upcoming listening materials. In this regard, Rivers (1981) believes a straightforward approach to assess students' interest on the content of listening materials is to ask students themselves. She maintains that the students can improve their listening ability if they listen to something in which they are interested.

Today, researchers are trying to identify the factors which influence the comprehension of spoken language. Chaudron and Richards (1986) enumerate several factors that can hinder listening comprehension, such as of personal internal factors, inattentiveness, personal disinterest in the topic, etc. Bacon (1989) discusses the impact of several additional factors, such as intelligence and language facility. Ur (1991) points out that the factors which have a direct impact on the improvement of listening comprehension are related to the students' motivation, interest, and the type of listening materials and tasks used in the class. Following Ur's suggestions, the present study was conducted to determine whether or not dictation type has any impact on the listening of Iranian learners.

For this purpose, the following research questions were formulated:

- 1- Does dictation have a significant role in the improvement of listening comprehension of Iranian students?
- 2- Does topic interest enhance the listening

asserts that because listening is an unobservable and abstract process, it is overlooked by teachers.

It is believed that listening process is currently gaining attention as a major area of interest in the literature of second/foreign language learning (Johnson, 1995; Bacon, 1989). Because it is an extremely important language experience, the listening process and the way it really works merit careful consideration.

To define the purpose of listening comprehension, Ur (1996) points out that listening comprehension enables learners to function successfully in second language community. Celce-Murcia and McIntosh (1981) believe that the aim of listening is to make learners understand the language used by native speakers. To fulfill this purposes, Doff (1988) mentions some listening activities, such as listening and paraphrasing, guessing definition, dictation, and filling gaps that give learners as much opportunity to listen to spoken English as possible.

Chaudron and Richards (1986) make a distinction between two processes involved in listening: bottom-up and top-down. Bottom-up processing refers to the use of incoming data as a source of information about the meaning of a message. From this dimension, comprehension process begins with the message received until the intended meaning is arrived at. Top-down processing, on the other hand, refers to the use of background knowledge in understanding the meaning of a message.

Morley (1985) provides a list of activities for listening comprehension according to the response the listener is going to give. The first kind of activity comprises exercises where the learner simply listens without necessarily

making any overt response; the second requires a minimal response to demonstrate understanding; in the third, the responses are more extensive and may involve reading, writing, and speaking; the last kind of activity requires a fairly demanding process.

Ur (1996) mentions that suitable practices in listening and making a response are dictation, paraphrasing, summerizing, translation, and answering comprehension questions. Concerning dictation, Sawyer and Silver (1995) assert that if a teacher is lucky enough to have a class of students who have never seen the written forms of the language, the argument of usefulness of dictation as a teaching device would be probably valid. Brodkey (1989), through an experimental research on dictation, comes to this conclusion that in foreign language classroom, dictation has a unique potential as a tool to convince some students of their comprehensibility. Parrot (1993) suggests that dictation is a very valuable source of listening practice. Ilson (1989) believes that dictation can be used as both a writing practice when the teacher is willing to employ a procedure for reproduction and as a listening practice when she wants to make students listen with attention as much as they can, so that they would write down what they have understood. Chiang (1995) expresses that in dictation there is a perfect combination of listening and writing practices in language learning: There is the accurate tongue, speaking to the listening ear; there is the reproductive hand bringing back to the intelligent and critical eye and ear. Therefore, in dictation all the faculties of perception, conception, and expression are alert and cooperative. Later, Chiang adds that dictation should be substituted for many other language practices.

Regarding different types of dictation,

ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted to support the notion that students' interest in the topics they listen to help them to improve their listening comprehension to a considerable extent. Besides, this study aimed at finding out whether practicing different dictation methods plays a role in the learning of and understanding English as a foreign/second language. To fulfill the purpose of the study, a group of 180 intermediate Iranian EFL students majoring in English translation was selected from Islamic Azad University, Abadeh Branch. First, the subjects were given a listening comprehension test as the pre-test. Then, they were put into four groups. Each of the three groups practiced a different method of dictation, that is, standard dictation, trans-dictation, and dicto-comp. The fourth group, the control group, received no dictation practices. Meanwhile, each of the four groups was divided into two. One half listened to the passages whose topics were chosen according to their interest, while the other half listened to passages with assigned topics. After seven sessions of treatment, a post-test of listening comprehension was administered. The comparison of the performances of the subjects on the pre-and post-test showed that those who received passages of their interest improved their listening ability more than those practicing on topics of no particular interest. Additionally, the results showed that the experimental groups improved their listening ability better than the control group as far as the dictation practice was concerned. Finally, the results showed that the performances of the subjects practicing dicto-comp was much better than the performances of those practicing standard dictation and trans-dictation.

Key Words: listening comprehension, topic interest, standard dictation, dicto-comp, transdictation.

Introduction

Nowadays, scholars believe that the ability to comprehend the spoken second language plays an essential role in second language learning. The endeavor of today's communication scholars and researchers is to shed light into the ways to help language learners' comprehension.

The ways through which one can improve his ability to understand a second/foreign language have absorbed the attention of speech communication scholars since the second half of the 20th century. The study of listening comprehension, in fact, becomes a polestar of second language theory building research and pedagogy (Anderson, & Lynch, 1988).

Until recently, listening comprehension has

attracted the least attention among all the four skills, in terms of both the amount of research conducted on the topic and the neglect that it suffered in most foreign language programs (Paulston, & Bruder, 1976; Krashen, 1982). This neglect may have stemmed from different viewpoints about the listening skill and the ignorance of the nature of this skill.

Taylor (1974) believes that the neglect roots in the fact that listening was previously considered a passive skill and that merely exposing students to the spoken language was an inadequate instruction in listening comprehension. In this regard, Rivers (1981) points out that the lack of attention to listening has no scientific reasons. Chastain (1988)

Interest in the Dictation Topic and the Improvement of Iranian Students' Listening Comprehension

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چکیده

این تحقیق اهمیت تأثیر شیوه‌های گوناگون دیکته و همچنین، نقش علاقه به موضوع متن شنیداری را در پیشبرد قدرت درک انگلیسی فراگیران فارسی‌زبان مورد بررسی قرار می‌دهد. بدین منظور ۱۸۰ دانشجوی ترم سوم و چهارم رشته مترجمی زبان انگلیسی دوره کارشناسی در دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی شهرستان آبادیه برگزیده شدند. در ابتدای ترم، پیش‌آزمونی که مبنای آن سنجش میزان درک دانشجویان از زبان انگلیسی بود، به عمل آمد. سپس دانشجویان به چهار گروه تقسیم شدند. یک گروه به عنوان گروه معیار، هیچ گونه تمرین دیکته انجام نداد. به سه گروه دیگر به مدت یک ماه و نیم طی جلسات متوالی، سه شیوه متفاوت دیکته (دیکته-ترجمه، دیکته استاندارد، و دیکته-انشا) داده شد. در ضمن، براساس نظرات دانشجویان، موضوع‌هایی که بیش تر مورد علاقه بودند انتخاب شدند و هر یک از چهار گروه مذکور به دو گروه تقسیم شدند: یک گروه به متونی گوش می‌دادند که موضوعات آن‌ها مورد علاقه‌شان بود و گروه دیگر موضوع‌های متفرقه را از طریق یکی از شیوه‌های دیکته دریافت می‌کرد، گروه معیار تنها به متون گوش می‌داد، بدون این که هیچ گونه فعالیت نوشتاری (دیکته) انجام دهد. پس از پایان دوره آموزش، از همه دانشجویان برای سنجش قدرت درک شنیداری امتحان نهایی به عمل آمد.

مقایسه نمرات پیش‌آزمون و امتحان پایانی حاکی از این بود که شنیدن عنوان موضوع مورد علاقه، تأثیر به‌سزایی در پیشبرد قدرت درک زبان خارجی دارد. به علاوه مقایسه بین گروه‌ها، نشان داد، شیوه‌های متفاوت دیکته به پیشبرد قدرت درک شنیداری فراگیران کمک شایانی می‌کنند و از بین سه روش دیکته، دیکته-انشا از همه شیوه‌ها مؤثرتر بوده است.

کلیدواژگان: درک شنیداری، علاقه مندی به موضوع، دیکته استاندارد، دیکته-انشا، دیکته-ترجمه.