

The Effect of Question Position on Listening Comprehension: A Case Study

Naci Yildiz¹ & Nikoloz Parjanadze² & Mustafa Albay³

¹ Department of English Language Teaching, Suleyman Demirel University, Almaty, Kazakhstan

² Department of English Language Teaching, International Black Sea University, Tbilisi, Georgia

³ Department of English Language Teaching, Ishik University, Erbil, Iraq

Correspondence: Naci Yildiz, Suleyman Demirel University, Almaty, Kazakhstan. Email: nacyildiz3034@gmail.com

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Abstract: Though speaking has been considered as the most important skill in foreign language learning process, listening has a fundamental value because learning does not occur without comprehensible input. Listening is a complex process in which learners must do analysis to accurately interpret. In listening learners need to interpret with a speaker to construct meaning. This study tries to find out whether listening strategies are effective to influence listening comprehension and the major goal of the study is to reveal whether pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening activities are the most important to decipher the main idea of a listening text. It has been found that while-listening questions play the major role in comprehension of listening materials.

Keywords: Pre-listening Activities, While-listening Activities, Post-listening Activities

1. Introduction

“Listening is the Cinderella skill in second language learning. All too often it has been overlooked by its elder sister: speaking” (Nunan, 1997, p. 42). There is a widespread assumption that speaking is the most important skill, for that reason listening has been neglected by learners in foreign language learning process. However, learning cannot begin without comprehensible input, therefore “listening is thus fundamental to speaking” (Nunan, 1997, p 47). In order to establish communication learners must understand the messages of speakers. For that reason, listening is not a passive activity, it is a complex process in which learners must do analysis to accurately interpret. Listening requires mental activity because discrimination of sounds, comprehension of lexical and grammatical structures, interpretation of stress and intonation in a listening process is hard work. The use of listening activities enhances listening comprehension of learners. This study explores which of the listening activities among pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening activities contribute to listening comprehension more than the others.

2. Literature Review

Listening is a highly-complex solving activities (Byrnes, 1984) in which listeners interact with a speaker to construct meaning through using their knowledge and background information. When learners are aware of the factors that influence their listening comprehension they will know their listening abilities. This recognition will help them set effective strategies and through these strategies, learners will be able to increase the level of listening comprehension. In other words, these strategies will be useful for learners in that they will provide them necessary components for better listening comprehension. Listening activities can support learners in interpretation of the listening text. Learners through some

activities during a listening activity can develop their understanding level. Karakas (2002) states that listening activities foster comprehension of listening texts. Listening activities are usually subcategorized as:

- pre-listening
- while-listening
- post-listening

2.1 Pre-listening Activities

Pre-listening activities is the preparation phase of the listening process. Learners are prepared for what they will hear. Moreover, learners are provided with some background information about the topic they will hear. When learners have prior knowledge their comprehension of the text will be facilitated. Language and culture are interrelated so cultural information will allow learners to understand the text with ease. Learners should know some details about the text. All the available information will enable learners to make predictions about what they will hear.

Vocabulary and grammar knowledge are important factors in listening comprehension. Without language knowledge learners might fail to understand the listening text. Learning new words and grammatical structures in pre-listening activities will enable learners to recognize them in the listening text which will lead to better comprehension of the listening text.

Karakas (2002) states that pre-listening activities usually have two primary goals:

- 1) to enable learners to activate their prior knowledge so that they can receive the coming information easily.
- 2) to help learners understand better through providing the necessary context for the listening text.

The activities done during pre-listening help learners in many ways to understand the listening tasks better so lecturers during pre-listening might:

- decide on what learners will listen to based on their interests and explain the purpose of listening task in advance so that learners have an idea about the topic and goal of the listening task which will play a role in comprehension.
- decide whether learners need to learn more structural, vocabulary and cultural knowledge.
- decide whether to study the listening text using top down (overall meaning) or bottom up processes (focus on the words and phrases).
- provide opportunities for group or collaborative work and discussions where learners reinforce their language and cultural knowledge.

2.2 While-listening Activities

During a listening task, learners try to interpret the messages to construct meaning. For an effective comprehension receiving the messages accurately is a significant step. In pre-listening activities learners gather some background information about the listening task. This information allows learners to make

predictions and when learners listen to a task they have an opportunity to revise their predictions. At the same time, language knowledge and cultural information learners had in pre-listening activities facilitate their listening comprehension. Through using all these components they have obtained in pre-listening activities learners make judgments about what they listen to. They endeavor to receive and interpret the messages of the speaker accurately.

The goals of while-listening activities can be identified as:

- 1) to enable learners to focus on speaker's language and ideas to understand.
- 2) to enable learners to focus on speaker's organizational patterns.
- 3) to enable learners to react and respond to the speaker's ideas and use of language.

Learners in while-listening phase decide on what they should focus on, what important points they should give attention to. These strategies will allow listeners to make predictions to develop their listening comprehension.

2.3 Post-listening Activities

To extend learners' skills post-listening skills are required. Learners in post-listening activities have an opportunity to use what they have learnt in listening tasks. They try to put new things they have learnt into practice through relating them to their life experiences. This is a good chance for learners in terms of language improvement. Learners listen to listening tasks and learn useful expressions and post-listening activities provide them an opportunity to practice in the target language. Furthermore, learners in post-listening activities assess how much they have understood in a listening task in other words learners check their comprehension. Learners in these activities understand the points they have not understood previously. Lecturers in post-listening activities can integrate listening skills with other skills, for instance they can allow learners to discuss an issue about the listening task. Learners in the discussion try to use the words and structures they have learnt in the listening task and they promote their communicative competence in addition to their listening skills.

Research Questions:

- 1) To what extent do pre-listening activities influence listening comprehension?
- 2) To what extent do while-listening activities influence listening comprehension?
- 3) To what extent do post-listening activities influence listening comprehension?

3. Research Method

3.1 Design of the Study

This study uses quantitative approach. Quantitative method has allowed gathering quantifiable data for the purpose of analyzing the scores of learners in listening tests. Learners in this study had a listening test which had 20 questions. Different listening activities were applied to the learners to investigate which of these activities are more useful to develop listening comprehension. The collected data has been used to generate statistics to demonstrate the differences between pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening activities in the listening process.

3.2 Sample Selection

The participants in this study were preparatory school students at Ishik University. 68 students participated in this study. It was observed that elementary level students felt under pressure during listening activities, and they had difficulty in understanding the instructions so they were not included in the study. There were four groups at pre-intermediate level at preparatory school at Ishik University. The groups were formed randomly without following any criteria. 20 students were placed in each of the four groups. The learners were not aware that they were a part of the study but it was announced that their test scores would contribute to their listening course averages.

3.3 Data Collection

The listening text which was used in the test was a conversation between a lecturer and a student. Pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening questions were prepared for learners in the groups. In the first group questions were given to the learners before they listened to the text (pre-listening questions). In the second group questions were given to the learners after they listened to the text (post-listening questions), and learners were allowed to take notes if they wished. In the third group the learners listened to the text and then they were given the questions and they listened to the text again (while-listening questions). In the fourth group the learners listened to the text twice and they took notes while listening. After listening, learners in the four groups had the same listening test which had 20 questions. The test results were analyzed and showed in graphics.

3.4 Findings

Learners in the first group were given the pre-listening questions before they listened to the text. They had a test after listening to it and it was found that their average was 14.4. Learners in the second group were given post-listening questions after they listened to the text. Learners were allowed to take notes while listening. They had a test and it was found that their average was 14.1. Learners in the third group listened to the text and they were given while-listening questions, and after seeing the questions they listened to the text again, and it was found that their average was 16.7. Finally learners in the fourth group listened to the text twice. Although learners were allowed to take notes while listening, it was found that their average in the test was 10.5. The test scores of learners are presented in table 1. This study revealed that both pre-listening and post-listening questions almost equally affected listening comprehension of learners. Learners who had pre-listening questions had some ideas about the listening text beforehand so they focused on the answers of the questions while listening. However, they did not pay sufficient attention to other points. Learners who had post-listening questions were not given any questions beforehand. They listened to the text by concentrating all points. With the help of note taking and post-listening questions learners were as successful as learners who had pre-listening questions. Learners in the fourth group were not given any questions but they listened to the text twice and took notes while listening. However, it was found that their average in the test was the lowest among all groups. This study showed that while-listening questions played a critical role in listening comprehension. Learners in the third group listened to the text without taking any notes. They were given while-listening questions and listened to the text again. The first listening provided a general

overview about the text for the learners. The contribution of while-listening questions and listening for the second time allowed learners to understand the details which led to better listening comprehension.

Table 1: Listening Test Scores

Students	Pre-listening questions	While-listening questions	Post-listening questions	Note-taking listening
Student 1	18	19	18	17
Student 2	17	19	17	16
Student 3	17	19	17	15
Student 4	17	18	16	13
Student 5	16	18	16	13
Student 6	16	18	16	12
Student 7	16	17	15	12
Student 8	15	17	15	11
Student 9	15	17	15	10
Student 10	15	17	15	10
Student 11	15	17	15	9
Student 12	14	16	14	9
Student 13	14	16	13	9
Student 14	13	16	13	9
Student 15	13	16	13	9
Student 16	13	15	12	8
Student 17	12	15	11	8
Student 18	11	15	11	7
Student 19	11	14	10	7
Student 20	10	14	10	6

	Mean	Median	Sample Standard Deviation
Pre-listening questions	14.4	15	2.2571523745873
While-listening-questions	16.7	17	1.565247584299
Post-listening questions	14.1	15	2.3819496658255
Note-taking listening	10.5	10	3.0693733288049

Figure 1: Mean, Median and Sample Standard Deviation

Standard deviation size is directly related to accuracy. If the data spread is small then the mean is more accurate. Small standard deviation results in better predictions. In figure 1 it is seen that the standard deviations are low so there is a low possibility of having errors in the statistical predictions.

4. Conclusion

Listening is a complex process. Although it is found by many learners daunting, its role in language learning process cannot be underestimated. The use of effective strategies can facilitate listening comprehension. Pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening questions help learners receive the coming information with ease. Learners through these questions will know what they need to focus on in the listening text. Learners will easily interpret the messages because questions will allow them to decipher the main idea of the text. Furthermore, these questions will provide learners with the context for the listening text which will reinforce their listening comprehension.

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