

## **The Significance of Pauses in EFL Listening Comprehension Tests**

**Abbas Zare-ee**

English Department, Kashan University  
Kashan, 87317-51167  
Iran

Phone: 0098-913-363-4757  
Fax: 0098-361-5513015

[zare-ee72@kashanu.ac.ir](mailto:zare-ee72@kashanu.ac.ir)

## **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PAUSES IN EFL LISTENING COMPREHENSION TESTS**

### **ABSTRACT**

Many EFL (English as a Foreign Language) listening comprehension tests use multiple-choice formats. How well such tests are devised is a crucial issue in EFL assessment and instruction. An important aspect of such tests is the time interval between items. Pauses between items are highly significant because they affect the processing of oral linguistic data and EFL learners require time to focus on form, as suggested by Krashen's Monitor Model. The present study examines the effects of variation in time interval between test items on the performance of a group of EFL learners studying English for a BA degree at an Iranian institution of higher education. Twenty-nine undergraduate students in a listening comprehension class took part in the study. Data were collected on their beginning proficiency and listening ability. As part of their course, the learners also took three parallel listening comprehension tests developed by the National Test Center of the institution (the central branch of the University Of Payame-Noor). These three listening tests were modified and the tapes were rerecorded to include 10- 30-, and 60-second intervals between items. The analysis of variance between their performances on the tests indicated that the length of time interval between items was a very significant factor. Students performed significantly better on the test with 30-second intervals between items. The findings of the study sensitize EFL teachers to plan for the assessment of listening performance. They also contribute to arguments about the depth of linguistic processing and the issue of time in EFL listening comprehension.

*Key words: Listening Comprehension, Processing Time, EFL learning*

## BACKGROUND

The listening skill is no longer viewed as a passive language skill. It is theoretically viewed as "an active process in which individuals focus on selected aspects of aural input, construct meaning from passages, and relate what they hear to existing knowledge" (O'Malley, Chamot, and Kupper, 1989, p. 418). As Richards (1985) points out, "current understanding of the nature of listening comprehension based on research in psycholinguistics, semantics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, and cognitive science has indicated many complex processes involved in the act of listening" (p.189). It is an active process involving various complex mental activities including receiving aural stimuli (Steil, Barker, and Watson, 1983; Wolvin and Coakley, 1988), attending to spoken words (Underwood, 1989; Wolvin and Coakley, 1988), attaching meaning to aural symbols (Chamot, and Kupper, 1989; Wolvin and Coakley, 1988), and reacting and responding to oral communication (Purdy, 1997; Steil et al., 1983). Therefore, it implies more than just the perception of sounds. It calls for attention to speech sounds for the purpose of understanding the intended message.

Listening to a foreign language is a highly complex problem-solving skill that requires attaching meaning to the stream of speech sounds and that is affected by various factors. A listener should perform a variety of tasks in order to comprehend speech in a foreign language. He or she has to rely on various types of knowledge such as lexical knowledge, grammatical knowledge, and socio-cultural knowledge (Bacon, 1989, Shrum and Glisan, 1999). He or she also requires the ability to organize and remember what is presented by giving 'conscious attention to the sounds for the purpose of gaining meaning' (Thanjaro, 2000:16) and by spending enough time to make sure that comprehension and intake of the second-language information takes place.

The listening skill is also a critical dimension in language learning in general and in learning English as a foreign language in particular. The importance of teaching listening comprehension in the language classroom has been a central concern of second language teachers and scholars for a long time and this attention has resulted in an increased number of listening activities in students' textbooks (Rubin, 1994). Activities on listening need to be assessed as a part of language teaching programs for different diagnostic and evaluative purposes.

The fact that listening comprehension takes place in the mind and cannot be directly observed presents great problems for language testers. Listening tests have to get the test takers to do something to demonstrate their comprehension. Therefore, there is almost always a situation in which different skills are mixed and responses involve skills other than listening comprehension.

As Lewkowicz (1981) points out, the listener utilizes not only his knowledge of the language being spoken but also his knowledge of the outside world and how it relates to the topic at hand, as well as his interpretation of what has been said so far, in order to comprehend the message. The listener hypothesizes about what the speaker will say next and uses his knowledge of the culture to help him understand linguistic complexities. He will therefore rely heavily on context and it is with regard to context that tests of listening comprehension have changed dramatically. There is now a

recognition of the fact that "if we ask students to decode short decontextualized sentences, we are not testing listening comprehension at all but asking students to engage in a very unnatural activity which seems to be confined largely to the second language classroom" (Buck, 1988: 22).

If the goal of an ESL program is "to prepare our students to cope with English outside the classroom" (Hafernic and Surguine, 1979, p.341), it is suggested that teachers try to avoid speech modification and/ or simplification and to provide students with the kind of language they are likely to counter in real-life situations (Bacon, 1998; Robinett, 1978; Ur, 1984).

The traditional sort of listening comprehension test in which the test taker must answer printed questions about what he or she has heard involves reading. One of the important aspects of testing the listening ability of EFL learners through such usually multiple-choice listening tests is the amount of time they are allowed for the test in general and for each item in particular.

In non-testing real-life communication, listeners are not usually affected by artificial time constraints common to listening comprehension tests. However, in testing situations, L2 teachers need to decide on the timing of their tests and item intervals. In the following example, taken from Gardner's (1999) suggestions, one can clearly feel the lack of uncertainty about the length of pauses on a recorded listening test:

"Assuming there are two texts, each approximately 5 minutes long, the recording should be as follows: "The beginning of the cassette will have a recording of all necessary instructions to the students. The students should then be given approximately three minutes to read through the questions for text A. After this, the announcer will give the title of text A. Text A will play through a first time. The announcer will then tell students that they have a given amount of time to check their answers. At the end of this period, usually one to two minutes, the announcer will tell the students that they are about to hear text A a second time. Text A is played again at the end of which the announcer will allow the students another minute to check their answers. The announcer will then return to tell students that they have three minutes to read through the questions for text B, and the same process as for text A will be repeated for text B. The entire process should be on one cassette, including the reading and work checking periods. At no time during the examination should the recorder be stopped. One of the most important aspects of this examination is the quality of the recording which should always be done on professional quality equipment." (p. 8)

A similar uncertainty among EFL teachers has been noticed by Ikeguchi (1999) for the use of listening comprehension materials where she says:

"So far, I have met two groups of EFL teachers with differing beliefs and practices. On one hand are those who argue that native English teachers should speak in the natural speech speed, regardless of whether students comprehend or not, because in so doing, students will be able to catch up later. On the other hand are those who argue that teachers need should slow down

their SR in the classroom for students to understand, gradually increasing SR when students are ready for it."

In multiple-choice listening comprehension tests where learners are required to read and mark the choices after each recorded item, a more serious consideration of time intervals seems in order. One relevant issue is the amount of time that is needed for the conversion of input into intake and for the processing of information. A second issue is whether giving more time to the test takers necessarily ends in more effective and deeper processing and, therefore, in more listening comprehension. Yet another important part of the problem of time in listening comprehension tests is whether it is justified to impose equal time limitations for processing the linguistic data of items and tasks that are different from one another.

The aim of the present study is to investigate the effect of variation in the amount of the time interval between test items (in seconds) and EFL learners' performance on listening comprehension tests.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

The learners of English as foreign language are commonly scared that they will not be able to understand everything that their teachers, other speakers, or the speakers on a tape say. One of their greatest wishes may be the speakers' reduction of their speed. Chastain (1988, p.195) suggests that "the reduction in speech can be accomplished primarily by speaking in phrases and lengthening the pauses between phrases". Speed of speech is one of the key factors affecting listening comprehension in second-language learners (Carrier, 1999; Derwing and Munro, 1997; Tauroza and Allison, 1990; Zhao, 1997). When nonnative listeners have trouble in understanding a message, they usually complain that the language is spoken too fast (White, 1987). Flaherty (1979) and Kelch (1985) found that slowing down the flow of speech is one of the characteristics that facilitated comprehension for nonnative speakers. Rate-controlled recorded text (by speech compressors, temporal spacing or multi-recording of texts) can not only be used to facilitate listening comprehension through reducing speech rate but it can also help language learners become accustomed to increasingly rapid deliveries (Griffiths, 1990b). Ikeguchi (1999) studied Japanese EFL learners' mean scores of listening comprehension for passages delivered at a slow, normal, and fast rates. Her ANOVA results showed that fast speech rate resulted in more errors in comprehension, both at the level of higher order skills and lower order skills and that normal speech rate resulted in reduced comprehension, while slow speech rate resulted in almost perfect scores.

In the case of speech perception, Reich (1980) reports that pauses have been found to improve the accuracy of detection and the recall of lists of digits and letters. He did some experiments to examine the effects of pause time on the perception of sentences. In one experiment he used a semantic categorization task and in another experiment a sentence recall task. His results indicated that in sentences containing pauses between clauses, words were categorized more rapidly and propositions were recalled more accurately than in sentences containing pauses within the clause.

On the other hand, Blau (1990) and Griffiths (1990a) claimed that reducing the rate of speech does not significantly aid comprehension except for low-proficiency learners. Nevertheless, Blau (1990) suggested that these findings are difficult to compare and draw conclusions since the researchers used different rates as the norm. Instead of slowing down the rates of speech, Lee and VanPatten (1995) recommended breaking discourse down into phrases, delivering them as chunks of speech, and maintaining natural intonations and pauses in the attempt to aid listening comprehension.

As far as the teaching of language through listening is concerned, many researchers argue that oral input needs to be modified. Researchers propose that comprehensible input is necessary for acquisition (Ellis, 1995; Krashen, 1985; Platt and Brooks, 1994;

VanPatten and Cadierno, 1993). Nevertheless, simply ensuring that input is comprehensible is not sufficient to promote acquisition (Ellis, 1995; Gass, Mackey, and Pica, 1998; Markee, 1997). It is comprehended input not comprehensible input that is important for acquisition (Ellis, Tanaka, and Yamazaki, 1994; Gass, 1988;

Gass and Varonis, 1994). According to Loschky (1994), a way to increase comprehension is for speaker to modify input directly at nonnative listener. Input modifications may be classified as either simplifications or elaborations. Simplified input is modified to facilitate learners' comprehension by using less complex grammatical structures and less complex lexical items. Elaborations, on the other hand, include repeating, explaining, and paraphrasing. Research results by Gass and Varonis (1994), Yano, Long, and Ross (1994), and Ellis, Tanaka, and Yamazaki (1994) show that modification positively affects comprehension in nonnative speakers. Speed affect not only the perception of language but also the production of language. Kern (1995), for instance, reported loss of grammatical accuracy and lack of coherence in the responses of his participants because of the fast pace of the discussions taking place in real time.

One reason for the importance of speed of speech in listening comprehension is the learner's speed of processing. Because attentional capacity is limited, not all the presented information is processed. Attention is allocated selectively to filter out part of the input. Dual-task performance studies, whereby participants are asked to listen to two auditory sources but ignore one, result in poor recall of information presented on the unattended channel. "L2 learners over-rely on detailed context-specific information available in spoken input" (Trofimovich, 2005, p.479) and therefore reduce their own processing speed.

Some studies have specially set out to examine the effect of psycholinguistic processing factors. Hulstijn and Hulstijn (1984) investigated the effects of time pressure, focus of attention (i.e. whether on information or on linguistic form) and meta lingual knowledge on the accuracy with which two Dutch word order rules (Inversion and Verb-end) were performed in a story-retelling task. Their results indicated that the time factor did influence two aspects of learners' performance, response duration and speech rate.

Another reason for the importance of speed of speech in listening comprehension is the depth of processing. Depth of processing theory claims that the way information is processed will to a large extent determine learning, with more elaborate forms of processing leading to more learning and better recall. The resulting memory traces may be more or less elaborate depending on the number and qualitative nature of the

analyses carried out on the stimulus ( Craik & Tulving, 1995), and ‘stimuli that are attended to, fully analyzed, and enriched by associations or images yield a deeper encoding of the event, and a long-lasting trace’ (ibid, p. 270).

They further suggest that the durability of the memory trace is a function of depth of processing. That is, stimuli which do not receive full attention, and are analyzed only to a shallow sensory level, give rise to very transient memory traces. Speech that is delivered at a fast rate may not allow language learners to have the time to elaborately analyze the oral input.

The significance of the speed of speech in listening comprehension and the amount of time interval between test items becomes even more complicated when one considers the fact that people with different cultures have different expectations about the pauses in normal communicative settings. Studying the functions of silence in interaction, Philips (1985) argues that silences are gaps where nothing is happening. Such gaps can be considered as indications of a breakdown in interaction if they continue too long. He pinpoints that gaps, like junctures, are cultural constructs and what is perceived as a gap in one context or culture may be perceived as a juncture in another.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper aimed to investigate the issue of time in multiple-choice listening comprehension tests. It attempted to show how variations in time interval between test items in a listening comprehension test could affect students' performance. This purpose of the study was to describe the differences in the performance of a group of EFL learners on three parallel listening tests with different time intervals between items. The time interval between test items as the independent variable that could possibly affect test performance was studied. Three levels were chosen for this variable as shown in the following table:

**Table 1: Three levels of the independent variable**

1	T test with 10_second time interval
2	T test with 30_second time interval
3	T test with 60_second time interval

More specifically, the study was designed to answer the following main research question:

Is there a significant difference between Iranian EFL learners' performance on three parallel listening comprehension tests with 10\_second, 30-second, and 60-second time intervals between test items.

To answer this question the following hypotheses were statistically tested:

H0: There are no differences between Iranian EFL students' performance on listening comprehension tests with 10-second, 30-second, and 60-second time interval between test items.

H1: There are no differences between Iranian EFL students' performance on listening comprehension tests with 10-second, 30-second time interval between test items.

H2: There are no differences between Iranian EFL students' performance on listening comprehension tests with 10-second and 60-second time interval between test items.

H3: There are no differences between Iranian EFL students' performance on listening comprehension tests with 30-second and 60-second time interval between test items.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

29 undergraduate male and female students (2 male and 27 female students) took part in this study. These learners attended a listening class at Aran and Bidgol Payame Noor University in Iran. The age range of the participants was between 19 and 24. All of them were studying English as a foreign language to obtain a first degree (BA) in English Translation. The selected sample was an intact group selected from the whole population of college EFL learners in Iran.

The learners participating in this study were freshmen and had all been admitted through a nation-wide university entrance examination (Konkur). Personal interviews with the participants indicated that none had taken English courses except at high school.

The participants were on their regular first course of listening and speaking at the university. Their performance on listening tests with different time intervals was observed as a natural part of their course with the cooperation of their teacher.

## **INSTRUMENTS**

Three listening comprehension tests were used for the purposes of this research. These three tests had been used with maximum test security measures for similar groups of learners on the same listening and speaking course. It is worth mentioning that end-of-the-term tests like the ones used in this study are relatively standardized tests designed by the central testing committee of Payame-Noor University and are parallel achievement tests on the same course book (New Interchange). Therefore, the researcher was convinced that the three tests performed with different time intervals between items were valid, standard, and parallel, as they had been confirmed and used by the expert test constructors of the university.

- 1) The listening comprehension tests that were used in this study were taken from the test repertoire of Payame-Noor University.
- 2) The original tests that were taken from the test repertoire of Payame-Noor University had items, which were read twice for the test-takers.



- 3) The repetitions of the question on the cassette were deleted so that they could be nearer to the real-life context of listening comprehension.

## **PROCEDURE**

To investigate the research question in this study, the participants' performances on listening comprehension tests were measured at the end of their first listening comprehension course. The participants were tested in three different sessions with one-week time interval between the sessions. The reason for this mode of administration was to minimize practice effects.

Each test was given to the participants in one session. In order to neutralize the effect of test sequence, the tests were given randomly to the participants, that is, first, the test with 10\_second time interval between test items; second, the test with 60\_second, and, then test with 30\_second time interval. The students were examined at three separate sessions.

Necessary instructions were given but the participants were kept in the dark regarding the real purpose of the tests. In other words, they took the tests as a part of their final assessment.

Each listening test item in the final listening comprehension exam is played twice to the learners during the usual examination session of Payame-Noor. However, as the repetition of the items was considered unnatural and inauthentic, the items were played only once.

At the end, the students' performance on each test was scored, statistically calculated, analyzed, and interpreted descriptively and analytically.

## **DATA ANALYSIS METHOD**

The data collected in this research was basically quantitative. In order to test the hypotheses put forward earlier, statistical methods of analysis will be run and presented in the next chapter. These analyses include the analysis of variance and the related post hoc tests. Descriptive statistics have also been used in order to present a clear picture of the performance of the three groups of scores collected in the data collection phase of the study. In other words, this study used both descriptive and inferential statistics to investigate the effect of time interval differences. The comparison of means, frequencies, standard deviations and simple summarizing statistics as well as the analysis of variance has been used to analyze the collected data.

## **RESULTS**

The data collected for the purposes of this study included three sets of tests scores collected from the same group of 29 freshmen EFL learners. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used in order to examine the data in more detail and in order to test the research hypotheses.

In the table that follows, the means, standard deviations and variances of scores obtained by the participants on the three tests are summarized.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on the Test with 10-, 30-, and 60-second time interval between items**

N	Type of test	Range	Mean	SD	Variance
29	10-second	21.	15.97	4.8	23.1
29	60-second	14.	19.97	3.9	15.7
29	30-second	9.	25.28	2.4	6.1

As table 2 shows, the mean of scores obtained on the third test with 30\_second interval is 25.2, which is more than the mean of the other groups. The standard deviation is 2.4.

The descriptive statistics summarized above show some differences between the performances of the same group of learners on parallel tests with different time intervals. However, in order to test the null hypotheses put forward in the previous sections, more in depth analysis will be carried out using the relevant inferential statistics.

Although some differences have been found between the means of the three groups of scores in the descriptive analysis described above, we are not sure if there are any significant differences between the groups of score on different administrations of the test. To this end, one way analysis of variance was used to test the hypotheses. Table 3 shows the results.

**Table 3: Analysis of Variance (One-way ANOVA)**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	41.8	21	1.99	8.04	.000
Within Groups	16.11	65	.24		
Total	58.00	86			

The result of the analysis of variance summarized in table 3. shows a significant difference between test types;  $F(2, 86) = 8.04, p = .000$ , therefore, according to the participants performance it was clear that there was a difference between them. To

come up with a more detailed analysis, the Tukey and Scheffe posttests were used. The result shows that tests with 30\_second interval are significantly better than their performance on the other two tests. The result of these analyses is summarized in the following tables:

**Table 4: Multiple Comparisons: The Scheffe Test**

<i>Test</i>	<i>(I) GROUP</i>	<i>(J) GROUP</i>	<i>Mean Difference (I-J)</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Scheffe	10second interval	60_second interval	-4.00(*)	1.02	.001
		30_second interval	-9.31(*)	1.02	.000
	60_second interval	10second interval	4.00(*)	1.02	.001
		30_second interval	-5.31(*)	1.02	.000
	30_second interval	10second interval	9.31(*)	1.02	.000
		60_second interval	5.31(*)	1.02	.000

**Table 5: Multiple Comparisons: Tukey HSD test**

<i>Test</i>	<i>(I) GROUP</i>	<i>(J) GROUP</i>	<i>Mean Difference (I-J)</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Tukey HSD	10second interval	60_second interval	-4.00(*)	1.02	.001
		30_second interval	-9.31(*)	1.02	.000
	60_second interval	10second interval	4.00(*)	1.02	.001
		30_second interval	-5.31(*)	1.02	.000
	30_second interval	10second interval	9.31(*)	1.02	.000
		60_second interval	5.31(*)	1.02	.000

Tables 4 and 5 compared the three different sets of scores obtained by the participants. They made comparisons between all of the means two by two. As the tables showed all of the differences were significant at 0.05. However, the greatest difference was between the 30\_second test and the other two tests.

Three time intervals between test items (10\_second, 30\_second, and 60\_second) as a minimum, a medium, and a maximum were compared.

The first research question I.e. a 10\_second time interval between each listening test was selected to see if minimum period of time interval led to a better understanding.

The mean difference between the test with 10\_second interval between items and the other two tests was significant. However, it was not as great as the other differences.

The second research question as the medium range of time interval namely a 30\_second time interval between the tests was selected to see what would be the result of the impact of it on the students' listening comprehension. The greatest difference of mean was between the test with 30\_second interval between items and the other group, indicating this time interval, which was neither too short nor too long, produced better result.

## DISCUSSION

Examining the first research hypothesis, the researcher came to the conclusion that 30\_second time interval between the items had a different effect on students' performance on listening comprehension tests in comparison with the test with 10\_second time interval. In fact, there was a significant difference between the students' performance on a test with 10\_second and 30\_second time interval between the item ( $p=.038 < .05$ ).

The result of this study can be discussed in relation to the "information Processing Model" which has proved to be widely influential in language comprehension. As noted by Peterson (1994), "listening comprehension can best make listening comprehension understandable" (p.126). In this model listening comprehension has been described as a series of steps of information processing which take advantage of both top-down and bottom-up operations. Comprehension of the message is essentially the internal production of that message. When raw speech enters the mind as acoustic data, it first enters the sensory stores and is taken into short-term memory (STM). Processing of the information is necessarily cyclical, due to the capacity limitations of the STM. No more than  $7 \pm 2$  bits of information can be held in the short-term memory at a time. These bits must be converted into syntactic constituents, and semantic units (propositions), and are stored under the related preposition category in the long term memory. (LTM). If there is no proposition in the short-term memory, to which the incoming proposition can be related, an LTM search must be initiated. A suitable proposition is recalled and is rehearsed with the new information.

In a review of this information processing in bilinguals, Doric (1979-in Peterson, 1997) points out that L2 processing takes more time at every stage: decoding, rehearsal in STM, organizing of information for storage, and retrieval of information from the long-term store. Memory capacity is less in the second language, and here, what we wish to argue is that the second language listener requires more time in the following stages: a) input processing b) decision-making c) differencing, and d) response production:

- a) Input processing; the inversion of input into intake, as noted by Schmidt (1990- in Thanjaroo, 2000), involves a process called input processing. As noted by Krashen (1991-in McLaughlin), "in order to think about input and

converting it into intake, a second language performer needs to have sufficient time".(p.25)

- b) Decision-making; Peterson(1997) "emphasizes the role of having enough time to decide how to deal with input, and a feedback loop to allow the listener to monitor comprehension".(p.111)
- c) Differencing; Michael Rost (2001, in Carter and Nunan) reports a study by Rost and Ross (1991) in which the listeners tend to use more 'hypothesis testing' in their listening to 'paused texts'.(p.11)
- d) Response production; Ur (1996; 110) emphasizes the role of enough time in response production. He notes that "when too many responses are demanded of the learners, information is coming in too fast and there is no time to respond during the listening.' The result is frustration and irritation'.

Given the research question and findings (cited earlier) and the arguments about differential effect of having more time interval between the items in a listening comprehension test, it seems reasonable to ask how much time is enough for optimal performance on listening comprehension tests. In other words, we can go further to ask whether a listening comprehension test with 60\_second time interval lead to a better performance than a test with 30\_second time interval.

Examining the second and the third research questions, it was found that there was no significant difference between the students' performance on a test with 10\_second time interval and their performance on a test with 60\_second time interval( $p = .839 > .05$ ). But interestingly enough there was a significant difference between the students' performance on a test with 30\_second time interval and their performance on a test with 60\_second time interval ( $p = .010 < .05$ ). In other words the students performed significantly better on a test with 30\_second time interval than in a test with a 60\_second time interval.

There are some arguments in the literature, as noted in section 5.2, about the importance of time in listening comprehension and we may expect that more time interval between the test items may lead to the expense of more cognitive energy or greater involvement. We may expect that the more time interval between the items, the more analysis of a stimulus, the more persistent memory trace, and the more likely it is that the listener will be able to process the input, apply the listening strategies and produce a correct response.

The results of this study, however, show that having 'more time interval' between the listening test items and 'the existence of more processing capacity' does not necessarily lead to the expense of more cognitive energy or a greater thinking over the test items. As a result, it does not guarantee a deeper input processing. In sum, these results show that deeper levels of processing do not necessarily take longer time to accomplish and in general, it is not time by itself but the depth of processing that is important as well.

All in all, these results emphasize the importance of time interval between listening items as it has been reported in earlier research studies and experienced by most of the language teachers and students. Yet having a 30\_second time interval has priority over a 60\_second time interval on the ground that the students perform better on a 30\_second test.

### **IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY**

The findings of the present study, however, do not imply that we should not consider the role of time interval in a listening comprehension test. In other words, other experiments can be set up to check if different time intervals make any important difference among different proficiency levels (Advanced, intermediate, or elementary).

Therefore, teachers, students, and test makers should take advantage of the benefit of the result of our study; finally, it is relevant to note that although this study was done on Iranian lower intermediate students, the implication may be extended to Iranian different proficiency levels.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

According to Selinger and Shohami (1989:254), the nature of research is such that the more answers are obtained, the more questions arise. Curiosity in L2 acquisition, as in other disciplines, leads researchers to more problems, more questions, and more area of research.

In the present study, the lower intermediate students were tested and the results showed that they were better on a test with 30\_second time interval between the items. Perhaps higher intermediate students would perform differently on the tests. Accordingly, different results would be found. For this reason, it would be suggested that those interested in this area, administer the same tests to students at different proficiency levels to test any probable interact between test items and proficiency.

### **REFERENCES**

- Bacon, S. M. (1989). Listening for real in the foreign-language classroom. *Foreign Language Annals*, 22, 543-551.
- Blau, E. K. (1990). The effect of syntax, speed, and pauses on listening comprehension. *TESOL Quarterly*, 24, 746-753.
- Buck Gary 1988. 'Testing Listening Comprehension in Japanese University Entrance Examinations'. Japanese Association of Language Teachers Journal 10/1 & 2: 15-42.
- Carrier, K. (1999). The social environment of second language listening: Does a role in comprehension? *The Modern Language Journal*, 83, 65-79.

- Chamot, A. U., and Kupper, L. (1989) learning strategies in foreign language institutions. *Foreign language annuals*, 22, 23, 24.
- Chastain, K. (1988). *Developing Second Language Skills: Theory and Practice*. NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Coakley et al. (1988). Listening in the educational environment. In M. Purdy and D. Borisoff (Eds.), *Listening in every day life: A personal and professional approach* (second.) (pp. 179-212). Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Craik, F. I. M., & Tulving, E. (1975). Depth of processing and the retention of words in episodic memory. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 104(3), 268-294.
- Derwing, T. M., & Munro, M. J. (1997). Accent, intelligibility, and comprehensibility: Evidence from four L1s. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 19(1), 1-16.
- Ellis, R. (1995). Modified oral input and the acquisition of word meanings. *Applied Linguistics*, 16, 409-441.
- Ellis, R., Tanaka, Y., & Yamazaki, A. (1994). Classroom interaction, comprehension, and the acquisition of L2 word meanings. *Language Learning*, 44, 449-491.
- Flaherty, Sister E. (1979). Rate-controlled speech in foreign language education. *Foreign Language Annals*, 12, 275-280.
- Gardner, L. (1998). Testing Listening Comprehension at the N.K.J.O. Orbis Linguarum Vol. 9 available at <http://www.nkjo-legnica.oswiata.org.pl/data/orbis/text/Gardner.htm>
- Gass, S. M. (1988). Integrating research areas: A framework for second language studies. *Applied Linguistics*, 9, 198-217.
- Gass, S. M., Mackey, A., & Pica, T. (1998). The role of input and interaction in second language acquisition: Introduction to the special issue. *The Modern Language Journal*, 82, 299-307.
- Gass, S. M., & Varonis, E. M. (1994). Input, interaction, and second language production. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 16, 283-302.
- Griffith, R. (1990a). Speech rate and nonnative speaker comprehension: A preliminary study in the time benefit analysis. *Language Learning*, 40, 311, 336.
- Griffith, R. (1990b). Facilitating Listening Comprehension Through Rate-Control. *RELC Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 55-65.



- Hulstijn, J. H. and W. Hulstijn. 1984. Grammatical errors as a function of processing constraints and explicit knowledge. *Language Learning*, 34, pp. 23- 43.
- Ikeguchi, Cecilia B. (1999) . Speech Rate and Listening Comprehension of ESL students. AILA, World Congress on Applied Linguistics, Waseda University, Tokyo, August, 1999.
- Kelch, K. (1985). Modified input as an aid to comprehension. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 7, 81-90.
- Kern, R. (1995). Restructuring classroom interaction with networked computers: Effects on quantity and quality of language production. *The Modern Language Journal*, 79, 457-476.
- Krashen, S. D. (1985). *The input hypotheses: Issues and implications*. New York: Longman.
- Lee, J. F., & VanPatten, B. (1995). *Making communicative language teaching happen*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Lewkowicz, J. (1981). Testing listening comprehension: a new approach? *Hong Kong University, Hong Kong papers in linguistics and language teaching* 14.
- Loschky, L. (1994). Comprehensible input and second language acquisition: What is the relationship? *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 16, 303-323.
- Markee, N. (1997). Second language acquisition research: A resource for changing teachers' professional cultures. *The Modern Language Journal*, 81(i), 80-93.
- O'Malley, M.; A. U. Chamot; and L. Kupper (1989). Listening Comprehension Strategies in Second Language Acquisition. *Applied Linguistics* 10(4):418-437.
- Philips, Susan, 1985. Interaction structured through talk and interaction structured through silence. In: Tannen, D.,
- Saville-Troike, M. (Eds.), *Perspectives on Silence*. Ablex Publishing Corporation, Norwood, NJ, pp. 205-215.
- Platt, E., & Brooks, F. B. (1994). The "acquisition-rich environment" revisited. *The Modern Language Journal*, 78, 497-511.
- Purdy, M. (1997). What is listening? In M. Purdy & D. Borisoff (Eds.), *Listening in everyday life: A personal and professional approach* (2nd ed.) (pp. 1-20). Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

- Reich, s. (1980). Significance of pauses for speech perception. *Journal of Psycholinguistic research*. Jul; 9(4): 279-89
- Richards, J. C. (1985) *Listening comprehension: Approach, design, and procedure*. In J.C.Richards (ed.) *the context of language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rubin, J. (1994). A review of second language listening comprehension research. *The Modern Language Journal*, 78, 199-221.
- Shrum, J. L., & Glisan, E. W. (1999). *Teacher's handbook: Contextualized language instruction* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.
- Steil, L, Barker. L, and Watson. K, (1983). *Effective listening key to your success. reading*, M.A: Addison,Wesley publishing company of listening as a process. The source for the SLER model of listening.
- Tauroza,S., and Allison, D. (1990). Speech rates in British English. *Applied Linguistics*, 11, 90-105.
- Thanjaro, Metinee, (2000). *Using authentic Materials to Develop Listening Comprehension in the English as a Second Language Classroom*. Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.
- Trofimovich, p. (2005). Spoken-word processing in native and second languages: An investigation of auditory word priming. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 26: 479-504 Cambridge University Press
- Underwood, M. (1989). *Teaching listening*. New York: Longman. Ur, P. (1984). *Teaching listening comprehension*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- VanPatten, B., & Cadierno, T. (1993). Input processing and second language acquisition: A role for instruction. *The Modern Language Journal*, 77, 45-57.
- White, L. (1987). Against comprehensible input: The input hypothesis and the development of second-language competence. *Applied Linguistics*, 8, 95-110.
- Wolvin, A. D., & Coakley, C. G. (1988). *Listening* (3rd ed.). Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown.
- Yano, Long and Ross, s. (1994). The effects of simplified And elaborated texts on foreign language reading comprehension. *Language Learning*,44,189-219.
- Zhao, Y. (1997). The effects of listeners' control of speech rate on second language comprehension. *Applied Linguistics*, 18, 49-68.

## APPENDICES

### EXAMINATION NO 1: (A TEST WITH 10 SECONDS TIME INTERVALS)

Directions: Listen to the questions (1-30) carefully. Then choose the best choice (a,b,c or d) and mark it on your answer sheet.

1.

Yes, I am sitting in the classroom.

No, I am not. He is over there.

No, I am standing here.

Yes, I'm his brother.

2.

Helen: I am going to repair it tomorrow.

Helen: I bought it this afternoon.

Helen: It is not very expensive.

Helen: You're welcome.

3.

My brother is an architect.

My brother is twenty five years old.

My brother is standing over there.

My brother is going to graduate soon.

4

Oh,.....

It is my favorite color.

it is Liz's favorite color.

The problem is this dark blue shirt.

Liz has recently been trouble-maker.

5.

Because.....

I always sleep until noon.

I worked five days a week.

I eat lunch at an all-night restaurant.

My classes all start at 8.

6.

Yes, he is an expert in technology.

Yes, he is a male head cook.

No, he is presently in the United States.

No, he is going to be the chief of the tribe.

7.

I'm going to have dinner at my parent's house.

always have turkey and smashed potatoes.

My friend and I make something different every year.

My friend and I enter the talent show at 7.00p.m.

8.  
I think it is better for you.....  
To floss your teeth not just brush them.  
To moisturize your skin and use sun screen.  
To do a cross word puzzle or read a new book.  
To drink orange juice with calcium added.

9.  
No, I did not wash my clothes.  
No, I did not listen to the music.  
Yes, I invited friends to my house.  
Yes, I worked in the yard.

10.  
My children.....  
turned on their T.V. and watched sports.  
rode the roller coaster.  
Came home late and felt really tired.  
took English classes for two years.

11..  
It was a little scary.  
Her name was Margarita.  
He was really shy.  
He was six.

12..  
I'm sorry, but I can't. I have to study.  
I'm sorry, I am going to have dinner tomorrow.  
Yes, I am having dinner now.  
Yes, I did have dinner with you yesterday.

13..  
No, I don't, because I have to wear blue jeans.  
Yes, I do, because my brother is a policeman.  
Yes, I do, because I want to perform in front of people.  
No, I don't, because my brother works outdoors.

14..  
Yes, and I'll have to listen to a speech.  
Yes, and I'll blow out the candles.  
Yes, and we will shout "happy new year".  
Yes, and we will watch the fireworks.

15. .  
Yes, I did. But I feel tired today.  
Yes, I did, I exercised in the morning.  
Yes, I did, I studied for the test all day.  
Yes, I did, But I shopped at the grocery store.

16..

No, I am not going to greet them.

No, I am not from Chicago.

No, I am not on vocation.

No, I am not American.

17.

Yes, I do. I am a guide.....

And I take people on tours to different countries.

And I sell clothes in a department store.

And I care for patients in a hospital.

And I serve for the passenger in a restaurant.

18.

These students work.....

To earn money to buy nice clothes for the weekends.

To earn money to go out on Saturday nights.

To earn money to pay for their car.

To earn money for college tuitions.

19..

Yes, I'd love to, what kind of food your cook serves?

Yes, I'd love to, let's meet at the theatre.

Yes, I'd love to, what time is the show?

Yes, I'd love to, would you like to go?

20..

He is at home now and looking for job.

He is twenty years old and married.

He is a painter and has an exhibition.

He is in Bangkok and his job is top secret.

21..

Do you exercise very much?

Do you have any problems?

Did you work as a hospital administrator?

Did you get married by the age twenty two?

22..

Yes, I did, I went for a drive in the country.

Yes, I did, I watched a football game on TV

Yes, I did, I went to a concert last night.

Yes, I did, I went to the gym and did aerobics.

23.

It was terrible. It snowed a lot.

It was terrific. I really enjoyed.

It was great. I was away last night.

It was great. I was on my vacation.

24.

I bet it is really a quiet place.

The place I live there is much crime.

I have to walk to place where I live.

I live in an apartment downtown.

25.

The rewritten form of the statement is.....

Tom is listening and looking seriously at Maria.

Tom is listening person looking at Maria seriously.

Tom is the serious-looking person listening to Maria.

Tom is the serious-looking person who listens to Maria.

26.

Yeah. He owns an interesting hotel.

Yeah. He does some incredible things.

Yeah. He has a wonderful wife.

Yeah. He cooks fantastic Greek food.

27.

Yes. many times. It's a very modern city.

Oh, really? It's a very beautiful city.

Yes, it is. It is very exciting.

No, I hate it. It is too small a city.

28.

Sure I can. What should I bring you then.

Sure I can. What is a good time to visit.

Sure I can. What should I see there.

Sure I can. What would you like to know.

29.

They can travel along the canal and buy things.

They can visit its fabulous beaches and mountains.

They can use many words to describe the city.

They can miss one of the largest city parks there.

30.

The best advice is .....

to put a heating pat on it.

to put some ointment on it.

to see the doctor.

to see the druggist.

## EXAMINATION NO 2 (A TEST WITH 30-second time INTERVALS)

Directions: Listen to the sentences (1-30) carefully. Then choose the best choice (a, b, c, or d) and mark it on your answer sheet.

1.....

- a) No, I am not. I am a student here too.
- b) Yes, I am. And engineering.
- c) No, I'm not. I am a freshman.
- d) Yes, I am. I study computer science.

2.

- a) these are my parents.
- b) they are on vacation.
- c) oh, that is my father!
- d) she goes to McGill university.

3.

- a) Yes, she works in a department store and sells clothes.
- b) Yes, she works in an office and answer the phone.
- c) Yes, she works in a hospital and cares for patients.
- d) Yes, she works for an airline and serves passengers.

4.

- a) I work every weeknight after school.
- b) I get home pretty late.
- c) On weekdays I get up around ten.
- d) I start work at three.

5.

- a) My brother is standing over there.
- b) My brother is a painter.
- c) My brother is twenty two years old.
- d) My brother is going to graduate soon.

6.

- a) Do women usually work after getting married?
- b) Do people get married young?
- c) Do people get divorced in your country?
- d) Do elderly people generally live with relatives?

7.

- a) I usually just watch T.V. in my free time.
- b) I almost always get up very early.
- c) I usually exercise very much.
- d) I sometimes watch T.V. before bed.

- 8.
- a) How good are you in sports?
  - b) Do you have any problems?
  - c) How often do you exercise?
  - d) How well do you play?
- 9.
- a) He is a university student.
  - b) He is a friend of mine.
  - c) He is twenty one years old.
  - d) He is about twenty one and pretty tall, with red hair.
- 10.
- a) I hate it. That's why I moved away.
  - b) It's not too small, but it's pretty boring.
  - c) It's an old city with lots of buildings.
- 11.
- a) Well, what is a good time to visit?
  - b) Sure I can. What would you like to know?
  - c) Oh, good! And what should I see there?
  - d) What can you do there?
- 12.
- a) I think I am getting a cold.
  - b) Try some of this new lotion.
  - c) I have something for tired eyes.
  - d) You should try some of these sleeping pills.
- 13.
- a) Yes, I'll bring it right away.
  - b) Yes, I'd like a hamburger and a salad.
  - c) Ok. What kind of dressing would you like?
  - d) And would you like anything to drink?
- 14.
- a) most
  - b) more
  - c) the most
  - d) more than
- 15.
- a) Oh, well, I moved into my own apartment.
  - b) Oh, well, I have two kids now.
  - c) Oh, well, I don't go to many parties anymore.
  - d) Oh, well, I have lost some weight.
- 16.
- a) No, I am not. She is over there.
  - b) Yes, I am sitting in the classroom.



- c) No, I am standing here.
- d) Yes, I am her brother.

17. Rex:

- a) I am going to sell it.
- b) You're welcome.
- c) It is not very expensive.
- d) How much is it?

18.

- a) He is in college here.
- b) He is twenty-one years old.
- c) Yes, he is- and he is very funny, too!
- d) My brother is married.

19.

- a) Early birds get up early in the morning and night owls stay up late at night.
- b) Early birds get up and stay up early in the morning or at night.
- c) Night owls stay up and get up late at night or in the morning.
- d) Night owls stay up late and early birds get up late.

20.

- a) Is her brother a salesman?
- b) Who is her brother?
- c) Where does her brother work?
- d) What does her brother do, exactly?

21.

- a) Yes, they're going to give me a cake.
- b) Yes, they're going to sing "happy birthday".
- c) Yes, they're going to celebrate my birthday.
- d) Yes, they're going to have a party for me.

22.

- a) I usually exercise in the morning.
- b) My friend and I make something different.
- c) I always have Turkey and mashed potatoes.
- d) I'm going to have dinner at my parent's house.

23.

- a) We are going to go to a restaurant.
- b) We are going to see a movie this weekend.
- c) We are going to drive tonight.
- d) We are going to order a cake.

24.

- a) I just can't sleep at night.
- b) I eat a lot of vegetables.
- c) I am going to give you some pills.
- d) I go to class by subway.

25. I think it is better for you.....
- a) To wear a seat belt that saves thousands of lives
  - b) To drink orange juice and milk with calcium added.
  - c) To floss your teeth not just brush them.
  - d) To drink eight cups of water that helps your body in many ways.
- 26.
- a) department store
  - b) drugstore
  - c) gas station
  - d) supermarket
- 27.
- a) You English is fluent now.
  - b) Did you call yesterday.
  - c) Did you go to college right away?
  - d) We have a test today.
- 28.
- a) How was college?
  - b) when did you start school?
  - c) Why did you take this class?
  - d) what was your major in college?
- 29.
- a) It's pretty cold in the winter, and humid in the summer.
  - b) It's a very exciting city, but too expensive.
  - c) It's fairly big city, but it's not too big.
  - d) It's an interesting city with lots of building.
- 30.
- a) chef
  - b) nurse
  - c) carpenter
  - d) guide

EXAMINATION NO 3 (A Test with 60- second time intervals)

Part 1:

Listen and choose the correct response:

The new phone number is:

- a) 2201-4593                      b) 2210-4593                      c) 2231-4592                      d) 2231-5492

- a) behind the tree                      b) to front of the tree                      c) next tree                      d) under tree

- a) Japan                      b) France                      c) Canada                      d) America

- a) shy                      b) happy                      c) funny                      d) smart

- a) she likes music.                      b) she speaks like a teacher  
c) she would like a cup of tea.                      d) she is very friendly and nice.

- a) How much did you buy them?                      b) Oh! Who did it?  
c) That's ok!                      d) Is it your favorite color?

- a) this blue suit                      b) this red cap  
c) these purple sneakers                      d) this green skirt

- a) 10                      b) 40                      c) 30                      d) 60

- a) Yes, everyday                      b) Just in the morning  
c) Yes, at nine o'clock                      d) Not very often

- a) Yes it's great                      b) Yes, it is fairly big  
c) Yes, three bedrooms                      d) No, but I'll buy one

- a) boring                      b) relaxing                      c) stressful                      d) easy

- a) He answers telephone                      b) he builds chairs.  
c) He looks after the flowers                      d) He sells different things

- a) recipe                      b) food pyramid                      c) chef                      d) menu

- a) cook                      b) flight attended                      c) salesperson                      d) bus driver

- a) but he is crazy about pop                      b) He needs a chair  
c) He doesn't have much time.                      d) He got bored.

- a) brother                      b) uncle                      c) niece                      d) nephew

- a) Yes, I do                      b) three times a week                      c) are you sure                      d) I play basketball

- a) Sure, I was.                      b) In a hotel                      c) For two weeks.                      d) Just two times

- a) at a bank                      b) in a Laundromat                      c) in a bookstore                      d) in a travel agency

- a) an apple tree                      b) in the garden                      c) in London                      d) some flowers
- a) No, I hadn't                      b) Yes, I was                      c) No, I didn't                      d) Yes, I have.
- a) dehydration                      b) altitude                      c) avalanches                      d) gliding
- a) dry skin                      b) backache                      c) cough                      d) sore muscle
- a) Neither do I.                      b) Neither am I.                      c) So do I.                      d) So am I .
- a) Recyclable                      b) fluorescent                      c) leaky                      d) disposable.

Part two: Listening comprehension

Listen to this conversation, then answer questions 26-28.

From where John is calling?

- a) From Austria
- b) From Australia
- c) From America
- d) From Los Angeles

Where is John?

- a) He is in a conference in Sydney.
- b) He is at a conference at Sydney.
- c) He is in a conference in Australia.
- d) He is at a conference in Los Angeles.

What is the time when John calls Dobbie?

- a) 4:00 A.M
- b) 4.00 P.M.
- c) 10.00 P.M.
- d) 10.00 A.M.

What would she like to be?

- a) a full-time student
- b) a photographer
- c) a lawyer
- d) a salesperson

How long does she work every weekday?

- a) thirteen hours
- b) eight hours
- c) three hours
- d) fifteen hours