

**A Comparative Study of Authentic Listening
Materials and their Simplified Versions on the
Listening Comprehension and Motivation of Iranian
EFL Learners**

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The present study was an attempt, to empirically investigate if there was any significant difference between authentic listening materials and their simplified version in terms of the listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners. To this end, two groups of thirty subjects were chosen. One group received authentic listening materials and the other group received the same topic in simplified version through ten sessions. The subjects studied Top Notch Book, level 3. The listening parts were followed with seven listening comprehension questions to assess the listening comprehension of the subjects. Then, at the end of the course, the listening comprehension scores of the two groups were compared by a T-Test. The result showed that simplified demonstration of materials had a benefit over the use of authentic version. A questionnaire was also given to the subjects at the beginning and at the end of the course to find out their motivation toward using authentic or simplified materials. The result indicated that there was no significant difference between two groups in terms of motivation.

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A very important issue which should be considered by language teachers is selecting appropriate materials and tasks for language classes. Teachers should know what to do and what to use in the classrooms to make language teaching and learning more interesting, motivating, and successful. It was assumed that authentic materials would help motivate students by creating a real life situation and interaction in the classrooms, rather than presenting language in its simulant communicative context (Celce-Murica, 2001). Researchers like Breen (1985), Widdowson (1990), Littlewood (1992), and Nunan (2001) have pointed toward discovering the impact of such materials on language learning. They have acknowledged the necessity for and practicality of authentic materials because of the rising interest in communicative function of language in general and communicative approach in particular. Authentic materials present content and meaning to learners and initiate a contextualized situation within which language is learned. Authentic materials may provide the teachers with means to create such learning opportunities. As stated by Berardo (2006), authentic materials enable learners to interact with the real language and content rather than the form. Learners feel that they are learning a target language as it is used outside the classroom. When teachers choose materials from various sources, they should note that the aim should be understanding meaning and not form.

Simplified English is not a new technique to bridge linguistic gaps across language groups, but rather is historically rooted in the academic and business communities. Ogden (1932, cited in Rivera & Stansfield, 2004, p. 84) developed the first "Basic English" system to provide a means of cross-cultural communication that would be easy to learn and apply. It consisted of a restricted vocabulary, based on 850 core words, and a restricted grammar system, based on simple sentence structures. Later, Ogden created a dictionary of 20,000 words. In the dictionary, each word was defined using the 850 core words. These included 500 nouns, 150

adjectives, and 100 verbs and other words. However, little attention was given to communication in this innovation.

Simplification is very extensively used to prepare materials for language learners. To become aware of simplification, we need only think of the graded readers which were published in enormous quantities and distributed through out the world in 1940's during the heyday of "reading method". According to Widdowson (1979), linguistic simplification is supposed to bring the language of the original within the scope of the learners' transitional linguistic competence.

Purpose of the Study

To fulfill the purpose of this study, the following research questions were addressed:

1. Is there any statistically significant difference between authentic listening materials and their simplified versions in terms of listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners?
2. Is there any significant difference between authentic listening materials and their simplified versions in terms of Iranian EFL learners' motivation?

To achieve the objectives of the study following null hypotheses were tested:

1. There is not any significant difference between authentic listening materials and their simplified version in terms of listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners.
2. There is not any significant difference between authentic listening materials and their simplified version in terms of Iranian EFL learners' motivation.

Method

Participants

A minimum of 250 male students aging from 16 to 17 learning English at English Department of Allameh Tabatabaei High School served as the subjects of this study, among whom 65

were chosen based on a Quick Placement Test (prepared by University of Cambridge and Oxford University Press) and the listening part of a TOEFL test to make two groups of authentic and simplified version based on their language proficiency level. From 65 students, 60 were chosen randomly. They were divided into two groups of thirty; thirty of whom made up the Authentic group, and the other thirty the Simplified group. The subjects were studying Top Notch book, intermediate level. There was no control group and both groups were experimental.

Instrumentation

At the very beginning stage of the research to extract a sample of homogeneous students at intermediate level, the researchers administered a quick placement test (designed by Oxford University press and University of Cambridge). Then, the subjects who had the same level of proficiency (i.e., intermediate level) were given the listening part of the TOEFL test to determine the extent to which they were homogenous in terms of listening comprehension. This test was considered as the pre-test of this study.

There were 65 students who had scored within +1 or -1 standard deviation of the mean score, from whom sixty were randomly chosen. Then, the homogeneous subjects were randomly divided into Authentic group who listened to authentic listening materials and Simplified group who listened to simplified versions of the authentic listening materials.

Simplified versions contained shorter utterances and less complex syntax and vocabulary than what appeared in Authentic ones. So, there were less embedded clauses and low-frequent words and the length of the sentences were reduced by the researchers themselves.

There was also a Persian translation of a motivation test battery conducted by the School of English Studies of the University of Nottingham, UK. This questionnaire also was given to the subjects at the beginning and at the end of the course to understand how motivated the subjects would be after listening to authentic materials or their simplified versions. This questionnaire

was made of 67 questions. Each question had a range of mark from one to six according to the subject's response.

Procedure

In order to conduct the proposed research, two groups of thirty subjects among 250 subjects at English Department of Allameh Tabatabaei High School were taken into consideration. The subjects were first chosen based on their performance on a Quick Placement test, so that the subjects who were within the intermediate level of proficiency could be chosen. In addition, the listening comprehension part of TOEFL (administered in July, 1998) was used to choose the students who were at the intermediate level regarding their listening comprehension skill. Then, sixty out of sixty five Subjects who had achieved ± 1 SD from the mean score were chosen randomly and divided in two groups of thirty. One group received authentic materials and the other group received the simplified versions of the same authentic materials through ten sessions. The subjects studied Top Notch Book, Level 3. The listening parts had the same topics but different versions. The subjects in the authentic group listened to the authentic version while the subjects in the simplified group listened to the simplified version of that topic which had been prepared by the researchers. The listening parts were followed with seven listening comprehension questions to check the listening comprehension of the subjects. Then at the end of the course their scores were compared by a T-Test to see which group had answered more correct answers and to check whether using authentic materials had a benefit over the use of their simplified version. A motivation questionnaire was also given to the subjects at the beginning and at the end of the course to find out their motivations toward using materials.

It should be mentioned that this study was quasi-experimental. In this study, using authentic materials and their simplified versions were the independent variables and their impact on listening comprehension and motivation of the subjects were considered as dependent variables. One experimental group was given authentic listening materials and the other experimental

group the simplified versions of the same authentic listening materials.

Data Collection

After the questionnaires and the listening comprehension tests (in both Authentic and Simplified groups) were collected, they were checked for completeness and then were scored. The obtained scores were entered into the SPSS program.

Both questionnaires had a six-point scale and the responses were weighted, i.e., strongly agree, agree, slightly agree, slightly disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree were scored 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 respectively. Thus, the sum of the scores of all the items would represent the individual's total score.

The listening comprehension tests were scored out of seven since there were seven questions for each test.

Results

The analyses of this section were designed to investigate the listening comprehension of the students in comprehending authentic listening materials which included complex sentences and words with low frequency level in the Authentic group, as compared to the listening comprehension of the students in comprehending simplified listening materials which included simpler sentences and words with higher frequency level in the Simplified group. The questions underlying this study were whether there is any statistically significant difference between authentic listening materials and their simplified versions in terms of Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension and if there is any significant difference between authentic listening materials and their simplified versions in terms of Iranian EFL learners' motivation. The results revealed that the students in the Simplified group scored significantly higher than the Authentic group in the listening comprehension tests.

Testing the First Null Hypothesis

In order to test the first null hypothesis, an independent t-test was run to compare the mean scores of the listening comprehension tests in both Simplified and Authentic groups. The t-observed value was 5.94 (Table 1).

Table 1.

Independent T-test for Total Listening Comprehension by Groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.247	.621	5.949	58	.000	5.167	.868	3.428	6.905
Equal variances not assumed			5.949	56.466	.000	5.167	.868	3.427	6.906

This t-value at 58 degrees of freedom is greater than the critical value of t, i.e., 2. This means that there is a significant difference between the scores of Simplified and Authentic groups. As displayed in Table 2, the Simplified group with a mean score of 51.17 outperformed the Authentic group on the listening comprehension test.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Total Listening Comprehension Scores

	GROUP	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
TOTAL	SIMPLIFIED	30	51.17	3.630	.663
LC	AUTHENTIC	30	46.00	3.074	.561

Thus, the first null-hypothesis regarding no significant difference between authentic listening materials and their simplified versions in terms of listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners is rejected.

Testing the Second Null Hypothesis

Since the second hypothesis involved the motivation of the students as a separate variable, it was necessary to convert the students' scores on the motivation test to a nominal scale based on which one can divide them into two groups of high and low motivation. To achieve this end, the descriptive statistics for the motivation test were calculated. As displayed in Table 3, the students' mean and standard deviation on motivation test are as follows:

Table 3.

Descriptive Statistics of Independent Variable: Motivation

Mean	268.82
Std. Deviation	27.034

Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics for the high and low motivation and authentic and simplified groups on the total listening comprehension test.

Table 4.

Descriptive Statistics for Total Listening Comprehension Scores

GROUP	MOTIVATION	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
AUTHENTIC	High	46.143	.736	44.668	47.618
	Low	45.667	1.125	43.413	47.920
SIMPLIFIED	High	50.308	.936	48.433	52.183
	Low	51.824	.819	50.184	53.463

Figure 1 below shows the mean scores of the groups displayed in Table 4. As displayed in figure 1, both high and low motivation groups performed better on the simplified version of the listening comprehension test.

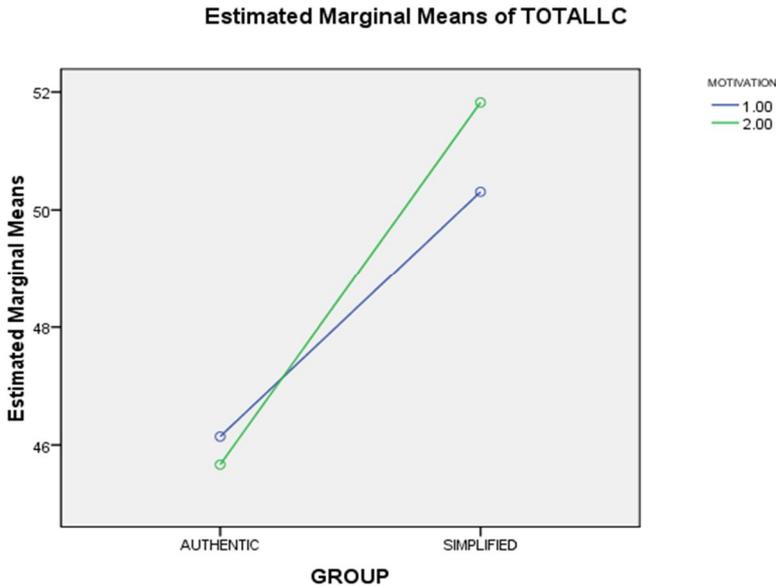


Figure 1. Both groups' total listening comprehension scores

A two-way ANOVA was run to investigate the effect of the type of listening comprehension material (authentic vs. simplified), motivation levels (high vs. low) and their interaction on the total listening comprehension test.

The f-observed value for the difference between the authentic and simplified groups is 31.76 (Table 5). This amount of F-value at 1 and 56 degrees of freedom is greater than the critical value of 4.01. Based on these results it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the authentic and simplified groups on the total listening comprehension test. These results once more confirm the conclusions made for the first hypothesis.

The F-observed value for the effect of motivation level is .32 (Table 5). This amount of F-value at 1 and 56 degrees of freedom is lower than the critical value of 4.01.

Based on these results it can be concluded that there is not any significant difference between the mean scores of the high and low motivation groups on the total listening comprehension test.

Table 5

Two-way ANOVA for Total Listening Comprehension

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	D.F.	Mean Square	F	Sig.
GROUP	361.786	1	361.786	31.765	.000
MOTIVATION	3.670	1	3.670	.322	.573
GROUP * MOTIVATION	13.475	1	13.475	1.183	.281
Error	637.811	56	11.389		
Total	142677.000	60			

The F-observed value for the interaction between type of listening comprehension materials (authentic vs. simplified) and motivation levels (high vs. low) is 1.18 (Table 5). This amount of F-value at 1 and 56 degrees of freedom is lower than the critical value of 4.01. So, it can be concluded that there is not any significant interaction between types of listening comprehension materials and the motivation levels of the students on their performance on the total listening comprehension test.

Thus, the second null-hypothesis, i.e., there is no significant difference between authentic listening materials and their simplified versions in terms of Iranian EFL learners' motivation is not rejected.

Reliability

The reliability of the motivation questionnaire is .88 which is a high reliability index for a researcher-made instrument.

	Mean	Variance	Reliability
Motivation Questionnaire	268.82	730.86	.88

The reliability index for the ten listening comprehension tests is .71 which is a good index for simplified listening tests.

Cronbach's Alpha	Tests
.716	10

Validity

The correlation coefficient between the motivation and the listening comprehension test is .31. This amount of r-value is greater than the critical value of r at 58 degrees of freedom, i.e. .25. The significant correlation between listening comprehension and motivation indicates that they tap on the same trait.

		Motivation
TOTALLC	Pearson Correlation	.301*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.020
	N	60

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Conclusion

As the result of the research indicates the listeners of the simplified versions scored significantly higher than the listeners of authentic materials. This implies that Iranian EFL learners perform better in comprehending simplified listening materials than authentic listening materials. It is to be pointed out that the issue of the research here was performance of the subjects on listening comprehension and not listening proficiency.

In foreign language learning, anxiety is a normal phenomenon which in some classes is not high because the students are not required to communicate in the target language,

like Grammar Translation classes; but it seems that in methods which focus on communication and speaking, the urgent need to interact can cause anxiety. It seems that anxiety makes us nervous and leads to poor performance. Anxiety wastes energy and may generate hopelessness and passivity, avoidance and forgetfulness.

If this is true, paying attention to affective variables is the base of language teaching. Teachers should be aware of the importance of negative emotional factors or affective filters and of ways to remove them (Krashen, 1985). Goleman (1995) presents a research which indicates that the affective emotions tend to make one ill. If this is true that affective side of language learning and psychological problems are the base and foundation of education and teaching, every teacher should be aware of them and take into account the principal role of affectivity. Scholars state that it is likely that anxiety is one of the most affective factors that obstruct learning. A good teacher should conceive the problem of anxiety and deal with it considerately and lead it in a constructive way.

As Sheerin (1987, P. 127) proposes, "The old adage that nothing succeeds like success is certainly true of listening comprehension, where repeated failure can result in panic and a very real psychological barrier to effective listening."

The pedagogical implication of this study is that to begin with, the level of difficulty of classroom language must be balanced to a level which is comprehensible to students. This can be done by lowering the semantic complexity of the tasks, or by providing enough language background information, or avoiding complex structures and idioms or repeating the same sentence patterns. In other words, expansion of the key terms and concepts increases comprehension and it is preferable because of richness in lexis and grammar which the students need for improving their knowledge of English.

Simplification is the method that teachers use and regardless of his or her belief on the role of simplified input, the language of the classroom is simplified and not authentic. Simplification, on the other hand creates difficulty in some occasions; for example; elimination of inflexion in language requires the speakers to learn where every word belongs to and at the same time it decreases the

richness of the materials and naturally the students encounter less authentic language.

The teacher should try to modify the way he speaks to beginning EFL students but not to the point where he speaks unnaturally slow or in fragmented English. He should, of course, speak as naturally as possible but avoid complex structures and idioms. He should repeat the same sentence pattern when giving instructions or asking questions. In conclusion teachers need to be quite explicit with beginner learners, but be increasingly natural and implicit as learners improve (Hyness, 2002).

Teachers should consider that the sentence length is sometimes necessary because it solves the ambiguity of the sentence. But sometimes the length of the sentence overrides the short term memory and makes comprehension difficult; in this case one should make it shorter. This research is an endeavor to reveal these problems. This study was supposed to make clear the impact of simplification on improving listening comprehension. After analyzing the data, one can come to the conclusion that there is a meaningful significance difference between the mean scores of those who listened to simplified versions and those who listened to authentic versions. This study shows that there is also no significant difference between authentic listening materials and their simplified versions in terms of Iranian EFL learners' motivation.

The Authors

Amir Hossein Morad, born in 1362, is an English translator and a researcher in the field of EFL. He translated the book “physical activities for improving children’s behavior and learning”. The mentioned book was published in Azad University South Branch. He graduated from Azad University, Science and Research branch in the field of teaching, M.A Course. He also graduated in the field of Translation from Azad University South Branch as the top notch student. He has been teaching English since 1380. He is interested in role play tasks in English. Now he is teaching at Allameh Tabatabaei high school, one of the best complexes in the country.

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بررسی مقایسه‌ای موضوعات شنیداری معتبر و نوع ساده‌شده آن بر روی درک شنیداری و انگیزه زبان‌آموزان ایرانی

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دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی واحد علوم و تحقیقات تهران

تحقیق انجام شده تلاشی بود برای فهمیدن این موضوع که آیا تفاوت معنا داری بین موضوعات شنیداری معتبر و نوع ساده شده آن بر روی درک شنیداری زبان آموزان ایرانی وجود دارد. بدین منظور دو گروه 30 نفره از 250 زبان آموز مجتمع علمی فرهنگی علامه طباطبایی انتخاب شدند. این دو گروه پس از برگزاری آزمون تعیین سطح (تهیه شده بوسیله دانشگاه آکسفورد و کمبریج) بر مبنای سطح متوسط انتخاب شدند. سپس آزمون شنیداری تافل برگزار شد تا دانش آموزانی که بین +1 و -1 انحراف از میانگین قرار می‌گیرند انتخاب شوند. 65 دانش آموز در این دامنه قرار گرفتند که 60 نفر از آنها بطور تصادفی در 2 گروه ذکر شده قرار گرفتند. یک گروه از آزمودنی‌ها موضوعات شنیداری معتبر را می‌شنیدند و گروه دیگر به نوع ساده شده همان موضوعات گوش می‌دادند. به آزمودنی‌ها کتاب تاپ ناچ سطح 3 تدریس می‌شد. آزمودنی‌ها پس از شنیدن به سوالات درک مطلب پاسخ می‌دادند. در پایان دوره (10 جلسه) نمرات آنها بوسیله آزمون تی مقایسه می‌شد. نتایج نشان داد که دانش آموزان در ارائه موضوعات شنیداری ساده شده نسبت به نوع معتبر آن نمره بالاتری کسب کردند. همچنین یک پرسشنامه انگیزشی در ابتدا و انتهای دوره به آزمودنی‌ها جهت سنجش انگیزه آنها نسبت به موضوعات شنیداری معتبر و نوع ساده شده آن ارائه شد. نتایج حاکی از آن بود که تفاوت معنا داری در انگیزه زبان آموزان ایرانی نسبت به موضوعات شنیداری معتبر و نوع ساده شده آن وجود ندارد.

کلید واژه‌ها: موضوعات معتبر، موضوعات ساده شده، درک شنیداری، انگیزه