



DEVELOPING ARABIC LISTENING COMPREHENSION OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS THROUGH AUTHENTIC AUDIO-VISUAL MATERIALS AND METACOGNITIVE STRATEGY INSTRUCTION

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Abstract. *Listening comprehension is often the least developed skill among Uzbek students of Arabic, whose training traditionally focuses on reading and the grammatical analysis of written texts. This article analyses the cognitive nature of listening, the specific difficulties that Arabic speech presents to Uzbek-speaking learners, and the methodological conditions for developing this skill at university level. Particular attention is paid to the use of authentic audio-visual materials and to metacognitive strategy instruction, which teaches learners to plan, monitor and evaluate their own listening. Criteria for selecting authentic materials by level are proposed, and a lesson cycle combining top-down and bottom-up processing with metacognitive reflection is described. The article concludes that listening should be taught as a process rather than merely tested as a product.*

Keywords: *Arabic language teaching, listening comprehension, authentic materials, metacognitive strategies, bottom-up and top-down processing, Uzbek learners, teaching methodology.*

INTRODUCTION

In the history of Arabic teaching in Central Asia, the written text has always been at the centre of instruction. Madrasa education trained students to read, analyse and memorise classical texts with great precision. This tradition produced strong readers and grammarians, but it gave little attention to understanding spoken Arabic at natural speed (Richards & Rodgers, 2014:5).

Today the situation has changed. Graduates of Arabic programmes in Uzbekistan work as translators, guides, diplomats, teachers and researchers. They need to follow



lectures, news broadcasts, interviews and everyday conversations. Yet many students who can analyse a complex written sentence fail to understand the same sentence when they hear it once at normal speed (Field, 2008:3).

Research on second language listening explains this gap. Listening is not a passive skill. It is an active process in which the listener decodes sounds, segments the speech stream into words, activates background knowledge and builds a mental model of the message, all in real time (Field, 2008:112; Rost, 2011:53). Because this process cannot be slowed down by the listener, weaknesses in automatic word recognition quickly lead to a breakdown of comprehension (Field, 2008:139).

A second line of research shows that listening can be taught, not only tested. Learners who are trained to plan, monitor and evaluate their listening, that is, to use metacognitive strategies, improve their comprehension more than learners who only listen and answer questions (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012:98). This finding is especially relevant for Arabic, where learners face additional difficulties linked to phonetics, diglossia and the rate of authentic speech (Ferguson, 1959:329).

The purpose of this article is to identify the main difficulties of Uzbek-speaking learners in Arabic listening and to propose a methodological framework for developing this skill with authentic audio-visual materials and metacognitive strategy instruction. The study is theoretical and methodological. It uses analysis of international research on language teaching methodology and listening pedagogy (Richards & Rodgers, 2014:22; Field, 2008:26), comparative phonetic analysis of Uzbek and Arabic, and pedagogical modelling of a lesson cycle (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012:109).

MAIN PART

Listening theory distinguishes two types of processing. Bottom-up processing moves from sounds to words, from words to phrases and from phrases to meaning. Top-down processing moves in the opposite direction: the listener uses knowledge of the topic, the situation and the type of text to predict and interpret what is heard (Field, 2008:132). Skilled listeners combine both directions flexibly. Weak listeners usually



rely too heavily on one of them: they either try to catch every word, or they guess the meaning from a few familiar words and lose the details (Rost, 2011:61).

This distinction matters for Uzbek students of Arabic. Students trained in the traditional way have strong grammatical knowledge but weak automatic word recognition. They tend to translate word by word and fall behind the speaker (Field, 2008:142). The teacher's task is therefore twofold: to automate recognition of Arabic sounds and words, and to teach students to use context and prediction when recognition fails (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012:17).

Analysis of the two sound systems and of teaching practice makes it possible to group the specific difficulties of Uzbek-speaking learners into four areas. The first concerns phonetic distinctions absent in Uzbek. Uzbek has no pharyngeal or emphatic consonants, and learners therefore confuse *ḥ* and *h*, *ʿ*ayn and hamza, *ṣ* and *s*, *ḍ* and *d*, *ṭ* and *t*. Uzbek also does not distinguish vowel length, while in Arabic it changes meaning (*kataba* "he wrote" and *kātaba* "he corresponded"). The second concerns connected speech: in natural speech Arabic words are joined, the hamzat al-waṣl disappears, the article assimilates to the sun letters, and final case endings are often dropped in pause, so that students who know words only in their written, fully vowelised form fail to recognise them in the speech stream (Field, 2008:145). The third is diglossia: Arabic speakers switch between Modern Standard Arabic and regional dialects (Ferguson, 1959:325-340), and even formal programmes such as interviews and talk shows contain dialect features that students have never studied. The fourth concerns speech rate and processing load: authentic speech is fast and gives no time for translation, and learners accustomed to slow, carefully recited texts experience high anxiety, which further lowers comprehension (Rost, 2011:131).

Authentic materials are recordings made for native speakers, not for learners. They expose students to real speech rate, natural intonation and cultural context, and they raise motivation because students feel they are dealing with "real" Arabic (Rost, 2011:162). However, unsuitable authentic material can overwhelm learners. Table 1 proposes criteria for selecting materials by level, using the levels of the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2020:48).



Table 1. Criteria for selecting authentic listening materials

Criterion	Elementary level (A2)	Intermediate level (B1-B2)	Advanced level (C1)
Length of recording	1-2 minutes	3-5 minutes	5-15 minutes
Register	Modern Standard Arabic only	Mainly standard, some dialect features	Standard and dialect
Visual support	Strong (video, images, subtitles in Arabic)	Moderate (video without subtitles)	Weak or none (audio, podcasts)
Topic	Familiar topics: family, study, religion, daily life	Social and cultural topics	Academic, political, specialised topics
Typical genres	Short news items, children's programmes, simple interviews	News reports, documentaries, short lectures	Full lectures, debates, talk shows

For students of Islamic studies, religious lectures and Friday sermons are a valuable additional source. Students are familiar with their content and terminology, which supports top-down processing, and their motivation to understand such texts is usually high (Field, 2008:134).

The proposed lesson cycle adapts the metacognitive pedagogical sequence described by Vandergrift and Goh to the conditions of Arabic teaching in Uzbekistan (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012:109). It consists of six stages. The first is planning and prediction: students learn the topic and the genre of the recording, predict in pairs the possible content and the key words they expect to hear, and the teacher pre-teaches only the few words that are essential and cannot be guessed. The second is the first listening and verification: students listen once for the general idea, check their predictions, compare their understanding with a partner and decide what they need to listen for more carefully. The third is a second listening for details, in which students listen again with a specific task - answering detail questions, completing a table or ordering events - which develops selective attention.

The fourth stage is a third listening with the transcript: students listen while reading the transcript and mark the places they did not understand, which reveals the exact cause of each comprehension failure, whether an unknown word, a known word not recognised in connected speech, or a dialect form (Field, 2008:153). The fifth is bottom-



up practice: the teacher selects short segments that caused difficulty and uses them for focused exercises such as partial dictation, minimal-pair discrimination (h and h, ‘ayn and hamza) and dictogloss, in which students reconstruct a short passage after hearing it (Wajnryb, 1990:5). The sixth is reflection: at the end of the lesson students answer short questions in a listening diary - what helped me to understand, what did I fail to hear and why, what will I do differently next time - and regular reflection develops learners’ awareness of their own listening process (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012:112).

This cycle combines both directions of processing. The first three stages develop top-down skills and strategies, the fourth and fifth develop bottom-up decoding, and the sixth builds metacognitive awareness, which allows students to continue developing listening independently outside the classroom (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012:98).

Classroom time is not enough to develop listening. Students need regular extensive listening outside the classroom. Video platforms, podcasts and the websites of Arabic broadcasters make it possible to build a personal listening programme (Rost, 2011:172). The teacher can support this by giving students a list of recommended sources by level, by setting short weekly listening tasks and by checking listening diaries. Playback speed control and Arabic subtitles can be used as temporary support at lower levels and removed gradually (Field, 2008:168).

The development of listening can be assessed at two levels. The first level is comprehension performance, measured with tests based on recordings of different genres and speeds (Council of Europe, 2020:64). The second level is metacognitive awareness, which can be measured with a validated instrument such as the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire developed by Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal and Tafaghodtari (2006:431-462). Comparing an experimental group taught with the proposed cycle and a control group taught with the traditional listen-and-answer approach, on both measures, would show the real effect of the methodology (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012:289).

CONCLUSION

Listening comprehension is a key skill for modern specialists in Arabic, yet it remains underdeveloped among Uzbek-speaking students because of the text-centred tradition of Arabic teaching. The main difficulties are rooted in phonetic contrasts absent in Uzbek, features of connected speech, diglossia and the rate of authentic speech



(Ferguson, 1959:325; Field, 2008:145).

The analysis shows that these difficulties can be addressed through two complementary measures: systematic use of authentic audio-visual materials selected according to clear criteria, and explicit instruction in metacognitive strategies (Council of Europe, 2020:48; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012:109). The proposed six-stage lesson cycle combines top-down and bottom-up processing with regular reflection and turns listening from a skill that is only tested into a skill that is taught (Field, 2008:112).

Further research should verify the effectiveness of the cycle through a pedagogical experiment that measures both comprehension performance and metacognitive awareness (Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal & Tafaghodtari, 2006:455), and should develop a graded library of authentic Arabic listening materials for Uzbek universities (Rost, 2011:172).

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