




## The Effects of Listening a Text From a Native Speaker on Pronunciation

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### Abstract

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This study mainly explored the effects of listening a text from a native speaker on pronunciation. Native speakers of a language have, by nature, rhythms and intonations of their language. So, exposure to a native speaker provides a better understanding of how words and sentences should be pronounced. By mimicking their pronunciation, one can develop a more authentic accent. At the same time, this exposure helps someone avoid developing incorrect habits or mispronouncing the words. Therefore, listening something from a native speaker is necessary for accurate pronunciation, language fluency, vocabulary expansion and correcting misconceptions. Among the sources for native speakers created texts, internet and audiobooks are, of course, easily accessible by everyone. After checking the credibility and reliability of the sources, one can easily reach educational platforms, language learning websites and audiobooks featured by narrators whose native speakers. So, this study also investigated the contributions of internet sources, specifically audiobooks, to the language learning process. The participants are 20 secondary school students. In this study, an audiobook and its sound recording were used. In order to collect data, the teacher previously determined 20 words which are mostly mispronounced by students. While determining the words, the issues such as L1 interference, the side effects of the previous learning, differences in sound system of the native and the target language in terms of both segmental and suprasegmental features were taken into consideration. These issues were observed long time ago. This mostly mispronounced 20 words should be corrected in regards to intelligibility. As it is the first and the most important issue about pronunciation a language. While the students were reading the text, the teacher noted which of them wrongly pronounced. Then, in two weeks time, they listened the text at different times. While the students were reading aloud the text one by one, this time the teacher checked the words they pronounced wrongly before. The findings suggested that after the students' exposition to a native speaker, their mispronunciation of the words were mostly corrected. Generally, the findings imply that listening a text from a native speaker with the help of audiobooks has a positive effect on pronunciation.

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## Introduction

Listening is one of the essential social skills. It shows a person's ability to receive and interpret information in the communication process. Purdy (1997) defines listening that it is the active and dynamic process of attending, perceiving, interpreting, remembering and responding to the expressed (verbal and nonverbal) needs, concerns and information offered by other human beings. Without active listening, a person will not be able to receive and interpret the message. As a result, the communication process fails and the speaker can quickly become troubled. So, listening plays a crucial role in daily communication and educational process. Among the four basic language skills -listening, speaking, reading, writing- the one that is the most basic is listening.

Listening has a vital role not only in daily life but also in classroom settings. It can be seen in Rost's explanation (1994) that the importance of listening in language classroom as follows:

1. Listening is vital in the language classroom because it provides input for the learner. Without understanding input at the right level, any learning simply cannot begin.
2. Authentic spoken language presents a challenge for the learner to understand language as native speakers actually use it. (p.141-142).

Therefore, listening has a highly important role both in daily life and classroom atmosphere because it is vital to communicate efficiently for people.

In acquiring their first language, children start developing listening skills from a very young age by exposure to spoken language in their social environment. L<sub>1</sub> listening skills develop in a natural way as the child interacts with the other people. Besides, fluent L<sub>1</sub> listeners adopt spoken language automatically and without effort due to extensive exposure and practice. On the other hand, in learning a second language, listening skills demand active learning and intentional practice. They should actively engage with spoken language in order to understand and internalize meaning. While listening, the learners need to consciously concentrate on vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. Therefore, accurate perception and recognition of sounds and stress patterns are essential for understanding spoken language in the second language learning process. So, while L<sub>1</sub> listening skills develop naturally in time, L<sub>2</sub> listening skills require conscious effort, active learning strategies and exposure to authentic language use.

Knowing how to spell or how to pronounce a word provides a good communication setting. Ahmadi & Gilakjani (2011) state that pronunciation should be viewed as a vital and integral part of communication that should be covered with classroom activities. At this point, recognition and production in pronunciation is another important elements in the process of language learning or language exposure. Recognition (perception) of a word is the ability to understand and produce the sounds, stress patterns, intonation and other phonetic aspects of a language. In other words, it refers to comprehension of spoken language by a listener. It contains phoneme recognition, word recognition and stress and intonation. When pronunciation production is examined it is the ability to articulate and produce the sounds, stress patterns and intonations of a language. It refers actively speaking and producing the speech sounds and patterns.

In recent years, technology and internet resources have been increased in the field of English language learning. In this sense, audiobooks can be thought as a supportive tool for developing pronunciation and listening skills. So, integration of audiobooks into the foreign language learning setting can highly contribute to these skills.

By listening audio books, students will expose to the original sounds of English. As Jones & Fortesque (1987:57) suggest that teachers should change their traditional teaching materials periodically and instead of using blackboards, chunks, tapes and so on they should use recent technologies provided with some portable tools. That is to say, because the Internet has a great number of multimedia sources for second or foreign language teaching such as 'e-books',

'audiobooks', 'e-audiobooks' and 'podcasts' bringing authentic target culture into the classroom, teachers should benefit from them at a maximum rate and keep the students up to date.

The study aims to research the following questions:

1. Does listening a text from a native speaker has any effect on pronunciation in the language learning process?
2. What are the contributions of internet sources, specifically audiobooks, to the language learning process?

Participants of this study was limited to a secondary state school students in Turkiye. Their ages range from 11 to 14. The students haven't a bright background about English. In this sense, their exposition to English is only in the classroom.

## Literature Review

Listening is one of the essential skill in communication. However, it has never caught the attention until 1960s. As Nunan (1997) states that listening is the Cinderella skill in second language learning. It has been overlooked by its elder sister : speaking. This is because most of the people are of the opinion that being able to speak and write in the target language are enough to be successful in the second language. Finally, in 1960s, oral language skills gained importance. In the next years, with the explanations of Krashen's (1982) ideas, comprehensible input, the emphasis of listening skills raised. From those years onwards, listening has become more important in language learning process. Rost (1994) is of the opinion that listening has a crucial role in the classroom, because it brings input to the learner. So, according to him, if the input cannot be understood, learning is hampered. He emphasises listening skill should not be disregarded in any learning environment. Both in daily life and also in classrooms, listening play important role in order to communicate.

Listening also involves the organization and the use of auditory input to support interaction with people, events and experiences. From another point of view, it is not just about ears, it is about brain as well. Detection of the sounds, discrimination of similarities, differences between sounds and understanding of what sounds mean, they are all about correlation between listening and brain function. It needs attention to grasp the meaning. So, at this point, one of the essential elements of the language learning, pronunciation, come into view. In order to clear understanding of the target language speaking, knowledge of pronunciation can not be disregarded. By means of this knowledge, learners easily grasp the spoken words. While the role of pronunciation is vital in English language, many teachers do not give importance sufficiently because of various reasons. When it is looked to the history, there were times in which pronunciation was given first priority. For example, in audiolingual period, it was the center of the classroom learning, as the main focus was listening and repeating. That is, listening the sounds was a crucial point for learners. However, the importance given started to lose in time and then the focus became grammar and vocabulary. It can be understood that importance of pronunciation in English language teaching sometimes went high, in some periods went down. Nonetheless, with the introduction of new approaches to English language teaching, teaching/learning pronunciation has finally taken its place. From the years onwards, pronunciation awareness and its importance have given way for many researchers in this field to develop formal training of pronunciation. Both teachers and learners can take the advantage of Internet resources. Since, they can bring the target language, culture and literature either into the classroom or their homes.

Nowadays, the internet resources offer a great number of multimedia elements for second or foreign language teaching such as 'audiobooks', 'e-audiobooks', 'e-books' and 'podcasts'. In this sense, audiobooks, recorded reading of a book that you can listen to, are one of the easily available

and usable one. While the traditional reading aloud is limited with time and place, audiobooks have not such limitations. Instead of face to face encounter, they enable listening activity via computers, smartphones, CDs, MP3 players and so on.

When it comes to language learning process, audiobooks have entered this field with the aim of a model for a native-like speaker (Gunduz, 2009). It is also stated that audiobooks, in ESL/EFL learning, boost learner's pronunciation and help their language comprehension (Gunduz, 2009). There are several researchers who have explored the use of audiobooks in ESL/EFL learning and their impact on learners' pronunciations. Some notable researchers in this field include John Field and Paul Nation. John Field has investigated the benefits of extensive listening, including the use of audiobooks in developing learners' pronunciation and oral skills. Whereas Paul Nation is not exactly focused on audiobooks, his work highlights the importance of extensive listening practice for improving pronunciation and overall language proficiency. It is hypothesised that listening to the audio version of a text may boost learners' awareness of the target language pronunciation (Couper, 2003). In addition to this, students have opportunity to develop their pronunciation skills both in recognizing and producing correct pronunciation, as the audio version of the text serves as a good example of correct pronunciation. A study was explored by Saka (2015) which discussed the effectiveness of audiobooks on the pronunciation skill of Turkish students. The result of her study released that all the students who listened to audiobooks did better in the field of recognition and production tests than they did before they listened. In other words, audiobooks had positive effects on the pronunciation of learners (Saka, 2015). Another research on the use of audiobooks with language learners has put emphasis on improving listening comprehension (Kartal & Simsek, 2017). Kartal & Simsek (2017) also stated that learners feel secure about their pronunciations because the narrators of the audiobooks are native speakers and also they will not have a fossilized pronunciation errors by listening and repeating. In addition to those, thanks to audiobooks, students can follow spoken form of the text with the written form simultaneously. At this point, Allan Paivio (1971), claimed that individuals handle visual and verbal information at the same time. So, combination of both verbal and visual materials can be useful in learning process. This theory and visual and verbal opportunity of audiobooks are coherent together.

## Methodology

### Research Design and Questions

Quantitative research aims to gather numerical data from people, objects or phenomena, then apply those results to make decision or to a wider group to draw accurate conclusions and design appropriate actions (Businessballs, n.d.). According to this data, quantitative research method was used in this study. By using this method, it was aimed to explore whether a difference appear in students' pronunciation by way of audiobooks.

The participants of this study consisted of 20 secondary school students. Their ages ranged from 10 to 14. The institute offered them 3 or 4 hours in a week. It corresponds weekly 120 or 160 minutes. They are academically at the same level.

An audiobook and its sound recording were used in this study. The name of the book, prepared for secondary school students, is "Fun with Stories". The book is divided into four different stories narrated by a native speaker. Of all the stories, the story, named "Zeynep in Istanbul", was chosen. The reason why it was chosen is firstly because the theme in the story is attention grabbing for them. Secondly, it is because the narrator's speaking speed and intonation is proper for the target students.

In order to collect data, beforehand the teacher determined 20 words<sup>2</sup> which the students mostly mispronounce them. It has been observed by the teacher for a long time that the students mispronounce these twenty words continually. Here are some issues why the students

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<sup>1</sup> See in Appendix-1

mispronounce these twenty words continually : L<sub>1</sub> interference, side effect of previous learning, differences in sound systems of native and target language in terms of segmental and suprasegmental features. These issues make it more difficult to pronounce for the students. So, the issues mentioned above lead the researcher to choose the 20 words for the research.

Firstly, each of the students read aloud the first three paragraphs of the story. While they were reading aloud the text one by one, the teacher noted which word was pronounced correctly and which word was mispronounced. After that, the students listened the same text from the narrator. They listened it frequently in their free times. There is no limitation about how many times they listen the text. During two weeks, there is no training on pronunciation, they just listened the text in leisure times.

After two weeks, each of the student read aloud the text. While they were reading aloud, the teacher this time checked the words they pronounced wrongly before.

The research questions which helped to guide this study:

1. Does listening a text from a native speaker has any effect on pronunciation in the language learning process?
2. What are the contributions of internet sources, specifically audiobooks, to the language learning process?

Below is the numbers of the mispronounced words by the students:

Table 1. *Comparison of the students' before and after their listening the text from a native speaker*

	Students	Numbers of the mispronounced words		
		Before listening the text	After listening the text	
	S <sub>1</sub>	19	10	
	S <sub>2</sub>	16	11	
	S <sub>3</sub>	17	8	
<b>Notes</b>	S <sub>4</sub>	20	13	<b>and Observations the Lesson</b> Generally, when table is examined, seen that numbers mispronounced before listening are very high. However, the students, mostly, the mispronounced after listening the Some students, listening the text, decreased their mispronounced
<b>about</b>	S <sub>5</sub>	15	7	
	S <sub>6</sub>	14	5	
	S <sub>7</sub>	20	10	
	S <sub>8</sub>	12	7	
the	S <sub>9</sub>	18	9	
it can be	S <sub>10</sub>	10	5	
of the	S <sub>12</sub>	18	8	
words	S <sub>13</sub>	13	7	
the text	S <sub>14</sub>	12	4	
	S <sub>15</sub>	10	3	
reduced	S <sub>16</sub>	16	9	
	S <sub>17</sub>	15	6	
words	S <sub>17</sub>	13	5	
text.	S <sub>18</sub>	19	12	
after	S <sub>19</sub>	20	14	
	S <sub>20</sub>	13	4	

words in half. Some, yet, reduced only a few of them. The others largely reduced their mispronounced words.

## **Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

Listening a text from a native speaker can certainly contribute to improving pronunciation skills, but here, in this research, there is a two-week time period. It may not be enough time to see significant improvement as pronunciations skills require practice and repetition in a long time period to develop. However, it is observed that two weeks of focused listening can at least help someone become more aware of pronunciation patterns and enhance certain aspects. In this short time period, students' improvement on pronunciations of these determined words is obviously seen.

## **Findings**

As it is seen from Table-1, numbers of the mispronounced words before listening the text are very high. However, after listening the same text from a native speaker, students pronounced the pre-determined words mostly correct. So, while reading a text, listening the correct pronunciation simultaneously facilitate students to improve their pronunciation. At this point, audiobooks are great companion for students in the process of learning pronunciation.

The Internet has no limits, but it must be seen as an empowering tool in terms of teaching/learning language process. It provides students with opportunities for exposure to natural language use both during and outside the class. Audiobooks, in this respect, can be used both in the class and outside the class. From this study and the other lots of studies, it is easily understood that audiobooks can be a good source of learning pronunciation.

## **Discussion**

This study mainly focused on secondary school students' pronunciation skills. While the previous studies of the same subject focused other age groups such as university students, adults, all the results are almost same. Listening a text from a native speaker had a positive effect on students' pronunciation. So, the results of this present study support the findings of previous researches ( Kartal & Simsek, 2017; Saka, 2015; Wolfson, 2008 ). At the same time, the result of this study can be explained by Paivio's dual coding theory as stated in Literature Review section. Thanks to audiobooks, learners have opportunity to listen and read simultaneously. They allow multitasking.

## **Conclusion and Implications for Further Studies**

The fundamental aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of listening a text from a native speaker on pronunciation. The result of this study showed that students who listened to audiobooks did necessarily better on pronunciation of the determined words. Students at secondary school level benefited most from listening to audiobooks. They pronounce the words mostly correctly after listening the words from the native speaker. In other words, it is reported that audiobooks have a positive effect on the students' pronunciation skill.

The findings of this study and the previous ones can be useful for language teachers especially in terms of developing students' pronunciation skill. Audiobooks, in this respect, can be a great source of target language pronunciation. Teachers should expose learners to the language input as much as possible. However, when it comes to the selection of proper audiobooks, teachers should do this with caution. They should select the audiobooks according to their level of English, their interests, their ages and time constraints.

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### **Appendix A:** 20 words determined by the teacher

1. years
2. lesson
3. animals
4. engineer
5. competition
6. who
7. OK
8. their
9. girl
10. attraction
11. Egypt
12. U.S.A
13. holiday
14. ear
15. congratulations
16. exciting
17. favorite
18. picture
19. behind
20. says