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## The types and the functions of the listening activities in Turkish and English course books<sup>\*</sup>

Derya Tuzcu Eken<sup>a\*\*</sup>, Şükran Dilidüzgün<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Kırklareli University, Kırklareli 39780, Turkey

<sup>b</sup>Istanbul University, Istanbul 34452, Turkey

### Abstract

Along with globalization, in our era, international communication has gained importance and thus the first aim of foreign language teaching has been to equip students with communicative competence. In order to communicate effectively and adequately in a foreign language, the students should be provided with real situations in which they would expose to language use and four skills, listening, reading, speaking and writing must be taken as a whole and given equal importance. Nevertheless, from past to present, in foreign language teaching methods, which are shaped according to the aims/requirements of foreign language learning, listening skills have been usually neglected. It is a fact that in the process of mother language acquisition the children stay silent and listen at first and then they start speaking, so it is natural to give place to listening comprehension from the very beginning in foreign language teaching. As the aim of this study is to determine the amount of importance given to the listening skills in Turkish language teaching and to make a contribution to teaching Turkish as a foreign language, a comparative study by taking the Common European Framework of Reference (CEF) as basis has been done at the basic level (A1-A2) using Turkish as a foreign language coursebook 'YeniHitit 1 (A1-A2)' and English language teaching coursebooks 'New Headway Beginner (A1)' and 'New Headway Elementary (A1-A2)' as sample in terms of listening comprehension exercises. This qualitative study has been realized via documentary analysis developing categories taking into account the listening activities in CEF and other studies in the field. The findings have been given in numbers in a quantitative manner, therefore mixed research method can be said to have been used.

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**Keywords:** basic level listening exercises; English language coursebooks; Turkish language coursebooks; CEF.

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<sup>\*\*</sup>Corresponding author. Tel.: +0-541-855-2260; fax: +0-288-412-8455.  
E-mail address: [derya.tuzcu@klu.edu.tr](mailto:derya.tuzcu@klu.edu.tr)

## 1. Introduction

Language skills are integral parts of language learning process and need to be developed in the language learning process. For centuries, on the other hand, every now and then new methods and approaches has appeared and disappeared and each one has focused on the development of different skill or skills. Yet, most of the time the least accentuated skill has been listening which is in general thought to develop automatically and thus being subordinated to other skills in the course of teaching and learning. Nevertheless, as Hinkel (2006) stated, in order to engage in conversation, people need to be able to speak and comprehend at the same time because in real communication one operates both together with other tools of communication. Thus, if we learn language for communicative purposes, especially at beginner levels teaching how to listen and using listening activities to develop listening is essential.

As a 'lingua franca' English preserves its place in FL learning, yet, other countries in order to teach their own languages to the speakers of other languages try to keep up with the latest trends in language learning and teaching, and every country follows a policy of language teaching. This is also unavoidable for Turkey where Teaching Turkish as a foreign language has risen in value for a few decades and as there are fewer materials, studies in this field has accelerated. In addition, a decade ago released The Common European Framework of References for Languages is a source of reference in the organization and evaluation of language teaching studies and materials. Thus, most of the coursebook writers and institutions in teaching Turkish as a FL as well as English have adopted communicative, interactive and social approaches of the framework while developing Turkish language teaching curriculum.

In line with developments, the main aim of today's FL teaching is to equip learners with 'communicative competence' in order to use language appropriately at various contexts. Communication, in the simplest term, is an action of sharing and settling on ideas and its tool is essentially human language. Besides, in the process of communication there must be a 'sender' encoding his ideas linguistically and a 'receiver' decoding these structures and reporting back. In verbal communication, this cycle is carried out via speaking and listening in return. Accordingly, in a FL learning environment before having the role of "sender" learners participate in communication as 'receiver, and being a receiver necessitates developing listening skill from the very beginning with the help of appropriate listening activities.

## 2. Listening

Throughout FL learning and teaching history, listening has experienced various periods with the new developments in sociology, anthropology, linguistics, politics and education. Listening, though being widely used but less taught skill in FL classes, used to be seen as a simple skill, in fact nowadays it is accepted as a complex and intricate process in itself and enables us to understand spoken language. It is both a skill area of language performance and a critical means of acquiring a second language (Rost, 2001). Thus, its importance is twice as much than other skills in language improvement. In addition, when compared to other language skills people spend more than forty percent of their communication on listening, thirty-five percent on speaking, sixteen percent on reading and just nine percent on writing in a day (Burely-Allen, 1995).

The term 'listening' is mostly confused with 'hearing', though hearing might be conscious or unconscious in general, the listening process starts with conscious hearing and here hearing is only one step of listening, because listening is much more complex than hearing and 'listener' uses various sub-skills/components that is subsidiary to understanding. Rost (1991) identifies those components as follows:

- discriminating between sounds
- recognizing words
- identifying grammatical groupings of words
- identifying "pragmatic units"
- connecting linguistic cues to paralinguistic cues (intonation and stress) and to non-linguistic cues (gestures and relevant objects in the situation) in order to construct meaning
- using background knowledge and context to predict and then to confirm meaning
- recalling important words and ideas

For a successful listening, all the components above need to be operated in the course of listening. Although these components are true of both L1 and FL listening process, in FL listening it is much more difficult for learners to apply these processes easily because of not being competent in the target language such as not knowing enough words and their pronunciations, not mastering language structures, intonation, stress and even being lack of cultural elements. Thus, especially at beginner level, listening is a skill that needs to be developed with the help of various activities. Moreover listening involves the usage of bottom-up and top-down models which can be summarized as parts of listening process. Bottom-up listening subsumes progressing from the minimal to the more complex structures and also includes paying attention to intonation, stress, rhythm. Thus, in this kind of listening the listener focuses on the structure of sentences, yet being aware of the structure is just one part of the process, therefore bottom-up process can only form one part of listening and not enough to explain all of human listening. Top-down listening, on the other hand, necessitates the usage of background knowledge in order to analyze the meaning of sentences. This type of process looks like buying a book because one cannot or should not buy a book without first getting an idea about it such as who the writer is, what the topic is, its type, heading, front cover picture and so on. This is the same as collecting information about a book and deciding on buying it by knowing all the necessary things about it. Accordingly both bottom-up and top-down processes are requisite in listening. Hence, listening activities that appealing to both models need to be developed and used in nearly all types of listening.

### 3. Listening in CEF

CEF internalizes ‘action-oriented’ approach to FL learning and teaching and which is in line with the general aim of today’s developing communicative competence in FL teaching. Besides, as it is said above listening is an active process involving multifaceted actions to be done, thus it can be deduced that both CEF’s and today’s approach to FL are in phase with our listening view. For this reason, the listening activities in the coursebooks that are going to be examined in the research are expected to be coherent with both the approach of CEF and recent trends in the field.

### 4. Comparison of listening activities in coursebooks

Listening process and thus the listening activities should be divided into three steps: pre-, while and post-listening to provide effective and successful listening for learners. In this study, listening activities in only beginner and elementary levels are going to be investigated with the idea that listening is the first skill that learners expose to and have to cope with. Therefore, ‘YeniHitit 1 (A1-A2)’ which is said to be arranged in the base of CEF and ‘New Headway A1’ and ‘New Headway A2’ which are world-renowned coursebooks in teaching English as a FL and follow and apply up-to-date methods in the field have been taken as sample.

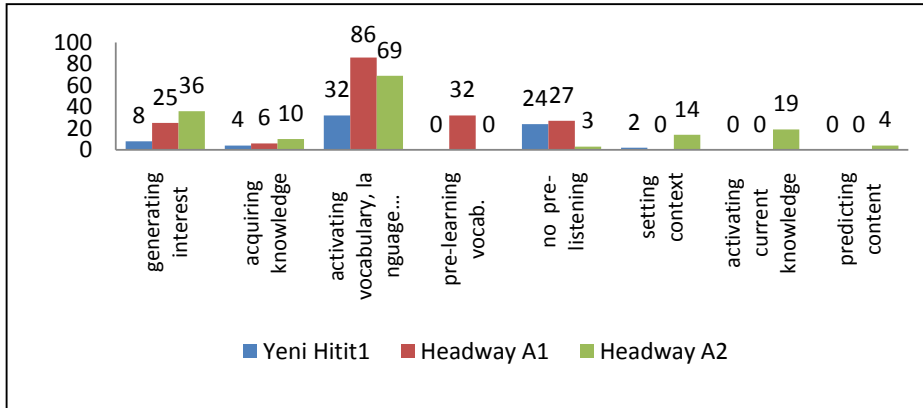
#### 4.1. Pre-listening activities

These types of activities are used to grasp learners’ attention, activate prior knowledge, built on background knowledge and make the learners be aware about what they are going to listen in a way giving them a motive to listen. These activities include task types such as in Leon (2009) and Pospieszynska (2000): setting the context, generating interest, activating current knowledge, activating vocabulary/language, predicting content, pre-learning vocabulary, checking/understanding the listening tasks etc. The number of pre-listening activities in the coursebooks can be illustrated as in Table 1.

As is seen from Table 1, there are pre-listening activities in ‘YeniHitit 1’ and these activities are mostly ‘vocabulary-language structure’ activities. Most of the listening materials are deprived of pre-listening activities and thus it can be said that these activities are lack of getting attention of the students and making them aware of the topic they are going to listen afterwards. In ‘Headway A1’ again ‘vocabulary-language structure’ activities are the ones that are commonly used, besides there is one more different activity in this coursebook that is not present in ‘YeniHitit 1’ and this activity is pre-learning vocabulary. In ‘New Headway A2’ there is much more various activities when compared to ‘YeniHitit 1’ and those are ‘activating current knowledge’ and ‘predicting content’ as

well as the others that take place in ‘YeniHitit 1’ but also the most used activity is again ‘activating vocabulary-language structure’ activity as a result of the level of the books appealing to basic level of learners.

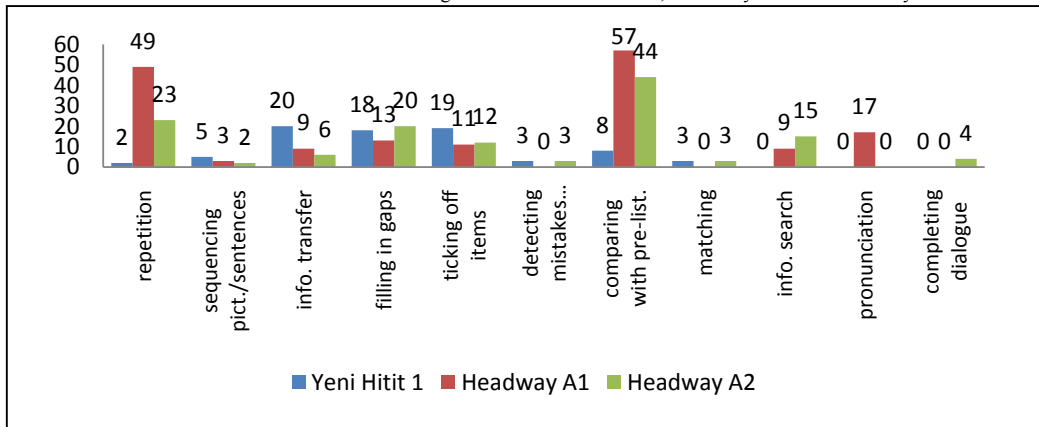
Table 1. The distribution of pre-listening activities in ‘YeniHitit 1’, ‘Headway A1’ and ‘Headway A2’



4.2. While-listening activities

These types of activities focus on mainlistening, and actual listening tasks take place at this point. In the coursebookwhile-listening activities can beshown as in Table 2.

Table 2. The distribution of while-listening activities in ‘YeniHitit 1’, ‘Headway A1’ and ‘Headway A2’



In the coursebook ‘YeniHitit 1’, listening activity types are: repetition, sequencing pictures-sentences, information transfer, filling in gaps, ticking off items, detecting differences or mistakes, comparing with pre-listening, matching the pictures-items which can be said to be diverse. On the other hand, the coursebook ‘New Headway A1’ does not include any ‘detecting differences-mistakes’ and ‘matching pictures-items’ type of listening activities yet it has activities unlike ‘YeniHitit 1’ and these activities are ‘information search’ and ‘pronunciation’. In addition to having all the above mentioned activities of the two coursebooks ‘New Headway A2’ has one more listening activity which is ‘completing dialogue’. Lastly as can be observed from the Table 2, though ‘New Headway A1’ and ‘New Headway A2’ coursebooks mostly involve ‘comparing with pre-listening activity’, in ‘YeniHitit 1’ the most common activities are ‘information transfer’, ‘ticking off items’ and ‘filling in gaps’. Here it is surprising that ‘YeniHitit 1’ does not contain any pronunciation activity which is in fact the most needed by the beginner language learners no matter which language they are learning.

### 4.3. Post-listening activities

Post-listening activities are necessary to enhance the learners' knowledge about the listened topic focusing both surface and deep structure of the text.

Table 3. The distribution of post-listening activities in 'YeniHitit 1', 'Headway A1' and 'Headway A2'

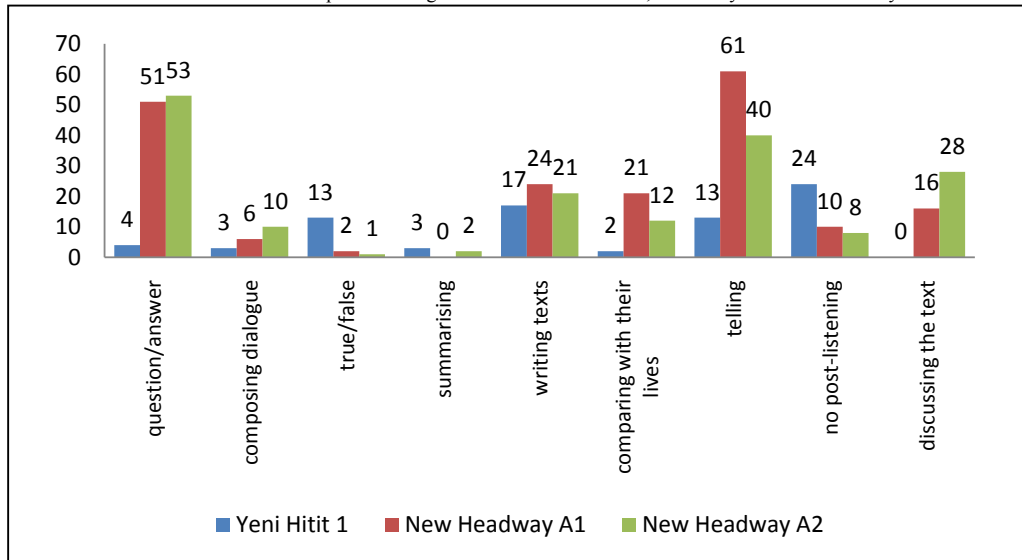


Table 3 illustrates the rate of post-listening activities in the coursebooks. Accordingly, in 'YeniHitit 1' the main activity is 'writing texts' such as letters, post cards etc. However, it is surprising that the maximum point belongs to activities that do not have post-listening activities. 'New Headway A1' involves all the other activities given in 'YeniHitit 1' except 'summarizing', and instead there is 'discussing the text' activity in this book. Lastly, 'New Headway A2' has all the activities included in the other coursebooks. Thus the number of post-listening activities surpasses others. Moreover, it is worthy of attention that in 'New Headway A1' and 'New Headway A2' 'question-answer' and 'telling activities' are predominant.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

Listening is a skill that needs to be supported by both pre- and post activities. In order to do so both bottom-up and top-down listening models need to be used interchangeably. Nevertheless, in 'YeniHitit 1', as is seen, in the pre-listening part there are not so many and various activities. The fact that activating language structures and filling in gaps activities are especially the ones that are widely used makes the coursebook tend to use the bottom-up model rather than top-down or integrating both. However, when the CD included in the book is examined it was found that listening texts contain paralinguistic elements such as ambient sounds, the tone of the voice of the speaker and so on, which reflect the real-life listening environment. Besides, the activities are appropriate to the CEF criteria. For example, the language of the texts is simple, comprehensible, easy and related to the immediate environment. Therefore, it can be said that pre- and post-listening activities of 'YeniHitit 1' are the only ones that need to be diversified and enhanced.

'New Headway A1' and 'New Headway A2', on the other hand, though being examined above one by one here are going to be paired with as both corresponds to the 'YeniHitit 1' in level. Thus, both are discussed as one coursebook. Accordingly, 'New Headway A1-A2' is more comprehensible than 'YeniHitit 1' and includes various

and diverse pre- and post- listening activities as well as while listening as are seen from the tables afore. Their CD is also appropriate to the real life environment, and dubbing is all given importance. The criteria of CEF can be said to have been taken into consideration.

The most important among others is that though ‘New Headway A1-A2’ includes pronunciation activities, in ‘YeniHitit 1’ this type of listening is not given enough importance. However, at basic level in language pronunciation activities are regarded as essential listening activities, therefore must be available in sufficient amount in the coursebooks.

In summary, when compared with the teaching English to foreigners coursebooks ‘New Headway A1-A2’, the listening activities in the coursebook ‘YeniHitit 1’, current in teaching Turkish to foreigners, need to be developed in order to keep up with the recent trends and methods of the era of teaching listening to foreign language learners though it cannot be said that ‘YeniHitit 1’ totally falls behind instead it is in line with the developments by a narrow margin.

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