Moroccan University Students' Ability in Comprehending Argumentative Listening and Descriptive Listening Discourses: Meknes and Kenitra as a Case Study

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ABSTRACT
The students' comprehension of listening texts in different types of discourse is mandatory at the university level. However, Moroccan university students still find difficulties when listening to some types of discourse, especially the argumentative and the descriptive ones. Admittedly, knowing about the hindrances that students face while listening to different types of discourse will pave the way for teachers to improve their teaching methods concerning listening skills. The objective of this study is to measure the Moroccan university students' ability to comprehend argumentative and descriptive listening texts and whether there is a correlation between the two types of discourse. Tests are used as data collection instruments that were assigned to 92 Moroccan Semester 4 students studying in education professional BA degree in the school of Art and Humanities Moulay Ismail University in Meknes, Ibn Tofail University in Kenitra as well as ENS (Ecole National Supérieure) in Meknes. The findings state that there is a significant difference between descriptive and argumentative listening ability as well as a significant positive correlation between the two sets of data.

KEYWORDS
Comprehension ability, listening comprehension, types of discourse.

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1. Introduction
Listening is categorized within receptive skills, yet it involves the listeners' active participation (Rogers & Farson, 1986). The listener has to interpret messages, identify and understands what the speaker is saying through understanding the accent, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and grasp their meaning. Then, listening involves a sender, a messenger, and a receiver to get the message. Roast (2009) also claimed that listening is an active mental ability. It helps us to understand the world around us and is one of the necessary parts in making successful communication (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). Furthermore, listeners should have the linguistic and non-linguistic background knowledge to understand the speaker's message and act on the basis of these background cues. Admittedly, having background knowledge makes it easier for listeners to understand different types of texts. However, university students still face some difficulties while listening and understanding different types of discourse that can be drawn to various factors that will be discussed in the following sections. Many researchers tried to analyze the difficulties that listeners face in the listening process. Yet, no study has dealt with the students' ability in comprehending argumentative and descriptive modes of discourse, especially among Moroccan university students. Therefore, examining and analyzing the ability to comprehend argumentative and descriptive listening texts and the correlation between them among Moroccan university students, especially S4 students, will pave the way to know about the listening difficulties that these students endure and will generate some solutions that would help them overcome these problems. Thus, this research basically seeks to answer the following questions:

1- Are S4 Moroccan university students studying in the education BA program able to comprehend argumentative and descriptive listening texts?
2. Literature Review:
This section deals with the different components of listening skills; then, it discusses the position of listening in the Moroccan educational context. It also sheds light on the argumentative and descriptive types of discourse and the students' difficulties while listening. Moreover, it mentions the aspects of effective listeners. Finally, it focuses on testing listening ability.

2.1. Listening Comprehension:
O’Malley (1989) defined listening comprehension as the key to many theories of second language acquisition and instruction, which focus on the beginning levels of second language proficiency (Asher, 1969; James, 1984; Krashen, Terrell, Ethman, & Herzog, 1984; windz, 1978; Wipf, 1984). This means that language acquisition is an implicit process in which linguistic rules are internalized by extensive exposure to authentic texts (Rostovsky, 1974; Winitz, 1978) and especially to comprehensible input that provides a modest challenge to the listener (Krashen, 1980). However, comprehending the message word by word is not mandatory. The listener has to focus on the general meaning to compensate for their misunderstanding by continuing to be involved in the communication (Little Wood, 2000).

2.2. Listening Processes:
The listening comprehension process needs two types of knowledge. The linguistic knowledge consists of “phonology, lexis, syntax and discourse structure” (p.2), and the non-linguistic knowledge that covers all comprehension features like “topic, context, general knowledge about the world and how it works” (Buck, 2001, p.2). A clear distinction, then, is made between two views, top-down and bottom-up processing, to better understand the process through which the listeners go through as they learn to listen. In the bottom-up processing, the listener gives much importance to the smallest units of speech than to phrases to combine them in order to achieve understanding (Harmer, 2001). Harmer also argues that “Without a good understanding of a reasonable proportion of the details gained through some bottom-up processing, we will be unable to get any clear general picture of what the text is about” (Harmer, 2001, p.201). As for top-down processing, “students start from their background knowledge” (Helgesen, Brown, 1995, p.10). To be more explicit, Harmer (2001) indicates that the listener tends to get the message and absorbs the overall picture of the listening passage. This can be realized unless the listener has the ability to have appropriate expectations of what is going to come across. In a nutshell, the process of listening is successfully realized when combining the two processing “bottom-up, top-down” as Harmer (2001) claimed, “Sometimes it is the individual details that help us to understand the whole; sometimes it is our overview that allows us to process the details” (Harmer, 2001, p.18).

2.3. The Position of Listening in the Moroccan University Educational Context:
Weaver (1972) comments that receptive skills are used more than twice as much as expressive skills. He also draws attention to the rationale for our capacity to remember how much of the time we talk but to forget how much of the time we listen. Additionally, special attention to listening had been drawn from time to time in the language learning/teaching literature by some leaders in the field (Palmer, 1917; Nida, 1953-1954; Rivers, 1966-1968). Blair (1982) agreed that special attention to listening had been taking place until recent times. The reasons for not paying attention to listening in a second language are due first to the intense concentration on “speaking” a language. Second, listening was used as a means to teach speaking. Third, listening was assumed as a passive skill. Moreover, instructional material used in listening comprehension began to appear in the early seventies (Morely, 1972 & Plaister, 1976). Furthermore, teaching listening in the BA education degree in the school of Arts and humanities in Meknes, in ENS in Meknes, as well as in the school of arts and humanities in Kenitra is taught only through the “oral communication” module. All the components of the oral communication module will be stressed by listening tasks that would allow learners to improve their listening strategies (Course Description of BA education program, 2019). This means that much importance is not given to the listening skill as such but to other subjects in which listening is an integrated part of it.

2.4. Listening Difficulties Encountered by EFL Students
Listening is considered the most difficult and challenging task for second language learners (Paulston, 1976; Eastman, 1987 cited in Mee, 2001). The listener is engaged in many processes such as differentiating between sounds, understanding vocabulary and grammatical structures, interpreting this within the immediate, as well as the larger socio-cultural context of the utterance (Vandergrift, 2007; Wipf, 1984, p. 346). According to Guo and Wills (2006), “listening comprehension is a complex psychological process of listeners’ understanding language by a sense of hearing. It is an interactive process of language knowledge and psychological activities” (p.5). This clarifies that listening comprehension involves linguistic and non-linguistic variables, which are important in the process of listening. However, if one of the variables is defective, the whole process will be affected negatively.
2.5. Types of Discourse:
Foucault (1969) defines discourse as “systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, and courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak” (p.49). Discourse, then, is any written or spoken communication. It can also be described as the expression of thought through language. Several scholars in many different disciplines (Swayer, 2002; Philips & Hardy, 2002; Keller, 2005) have theorized about discourse and its different types. The focus, then, in this research is on descriptive and argumentative ones.

2.5.1. Descriptive discourse
The description is used to create a vivid impression of a person, place, object or event. Brooks and Warren (1950) define description as “the kind of discourse concerned with the appearance of the world. He tells what qualities a thing has, what impression it makes on our senses. It aims to suggest to the imagination the thing as it appears immediately before an observer” (p.195). Descriptive texts give the reader a mental image of an object, scene, person, or emotional situation that the writer wants to inform about. Therefore, the main purpose of a description is to involve the readers so that they can actually visualize the things being described. A description is used by the writer to develop an aspect of the writing itself, for instance, to create a particular mood, atmosphere or describe a place. The writer wants the reader to picture what he/she is describing. Thus, descriptive texts engage readers’ attention, create characters, set a mood or an atmosphere and bring writing to life.

2.5.2. Argumentative discourse:
Argumentative texts aim to change the readers’ beliefs. According to Brooks and Warren (1950), The writer or speaker of an argument “may wish to make the reader change his mind, his attitude, his point of view, his feelings. He may appeal to the reader’s powers of logic in a perfectly objective and impersonal fashion, or he may appeal to his emotions, but in either case, the intention is to work a change in him” (p.29). Argumentative texts often contain negative qualities or characteristics of something/someone or try to persuade their readers that an object, product, the idea is in some way better than others. Argumentative texts generally deal with problems and controversial ideas and views. Reasons for or against some topics are put forward. But the basis of any argumentative text has to be provided by expository passages, by the explanation of facts, concepts, developments or processes. These texts can either be advertisements, articles in magazines or newspapers, letters in which the writer persuades the reader to be with his/her point of view.

2.6. Aspects of Effective Listeners:
Effective listening allows the listener to have access to others’ beliefs, objectives, knowledge and attitudes as this kind of information are disclosed to an effective listener (Bavelas, Coates & Johnson, 2000; Miller, Berg & Archer, 1983). Effective listening provides important relational assets such as setting up trust, sincerity and creditability between the agent and the listener (Blader & Tyler, 2003; Detert & Burris, 2007; Yulk, Kim & Falbe, 1996). Moreover, Kline (1996) focused on thinking, feeling and doing as three major components of learning how to be an effective listener. While thinking, the listener needs to understand the complexities of listening, should be prepared to listen, be adapted to the situation, should focus on ideas or key points, capitalize on the speed of differential, enhance learning through careful organization and presentation of ideas. Moreover, feeling about listening is important in the sense that the listener needs to have an intention to listen, delays judgement, gets in the way of understanding the speaker’s message without biases, accepts responsibility for understanding, and encourages others to talk. Furthermore, the doing element of listening ensures that the listener needs to establish contact with the speaker, take notes effectively, be a physically involved listener, avoid negative mannerisms or negative reactions, exercises the listening muscles, and put oneself in another’s position to ensure listening.

2.7. Testing Listening Skills:
Tests are a subset of assessment, and the assessment is an ongoing pedagogical process that includes a number of evaluative acts on the part of the teacher (Okara, Tahum, Mei, 2013). Assessment is referred to be informal because it is usually unplanned and spontaneous and without specific scoring and grading formats. Tests, on the other hand, are planned sets of tasks or exercises, with a designated time, often announced in advance, prepared for students and offer specific scoring or grading formats. Testing listening skills is based on many principles, among which are practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity and washback or feedback. Moreover, there are many techniques used to test listening comprehension ability, such as limited response that includes native-language responses, picture cues, and simple task responses; there is also an appropriate multiple-choice response, testing extended communication, short lecture contexts, social/business contexts among others.

3. Research methodology
The sample of this current study is based on semester four male and female university students studying in BA education program in the school of Arts and Humanities University Moulay Ismail in Meknes, ENS (Ecole National Supérieure) in Meknes, as well as the school of Arts and Humanities university Ibn Tofail in Kenitra during 2020-2021 academic year. The sample includes 92
participants studying in the same BA program but from different universities. The objective of this study is to measure the students' ability in comprehending descriptive and argumentative listening texts and whether there is a correlation between the two types of discourse. To collect data, two tests were selected to measure the students' ability in understanding descriptive and argumentative listening texts. The two tests include similar competencies testing items like vocabulary, true/false questions, open-ended questions, sentence completion questions, multiple-Choice questions, paraphrasing, outlining and summarizing. To analyze data, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient and simple linear regression analysis were used for statistical analysis to measure the students' ability in comprehending listening texts and to see whether descriptive and argumentative types of discourse correlate together to enhance comprehension.

4. Discussion of Results
The current study is based on the following research questions: 1- Are semester four Moroccan university students able to comprehend descriptive and argumentative listening texts? And 2- Is there a relationship between descriptive listening and argumentative listening abilities among semester four students? To measure students' listening ability, descriptive statistics were displayed. After that, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated together with regression analysis to determine whether the two modalities were related.

4.1. Descriptive Statistics
The results of descriptive statistics showed that a total number of 92 participants took part in this study. These results showed that the scores of descriptive listening abilities (DLA) ranged from a minimum of 0,00/20 to a maximum of 18,50/20, and argumentative listening abilities (ALA) ranged from 2,00/20 to a maximum of 19,50/20. The mean of DLA is 12,22, whereas the mean of ALA scores is 12,65. The standard deviation values all revealed that there is more variance in descriptive listening abilities scores since 3,50 is smaller than 3,91. In other words, argumentative listening scores are closer to the mean than descriptive listening scores; and descriptive listening scores are slightly farther from the mean.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.1. Descriptive Statistics of Descriptive Listening and Argumentative Listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive Statistics of Descriptive Listening and Argumentative Listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DLA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The descriptive statistics showed that since the argumentative listening means is higher than the descriptive listening mean, learners' argumentative listening abilities are better than their descriptive listening ones. However, in order to determine whether there is a relationship between DLA and ALA scores, a paired samples t-test was relied on to compare the means.

The results of this test clarifies that there is a significant difference between DLA (M=12,22, SD= 3,91) and ALA (M= 12,65, SD= 3,50) scores; t (91) = -1,11, p < .001. Hence, the average mean of DLA is significantly different from the average mean of ALA. These findings show that descriptive listening abilities are below the argumentative listening counterparts, and this difference was proven to be significant. Table 4.2. below displays these results:
4.2. Results of correlation

The assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity were checked by plotting a scatter plot of the relationship between DLA and ALA. A straight line went through the bulk of the dots, which looked randomly scattered around the line as demonstrated in figure 4.1 below; thus, this examination suggested a linear relationship between DLA and ALA. Furthermore, the spread of the data is similar along the line; the distance between the points from the line is fairly similar as we move from the left to the right despite some variation. The dots are not cone-shaped or curved. As a result, the homoscedasticity assumption is met (see figure 4.1 below).

**Figure 4.1. Scatter plot of Descriptive Listening and Argumentative Listening**

The visual inspection of the scatter plot reveals that there is a linear positive association between DLA and ALA. To determine the degree of this relationship, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed. The correlational results show that there is a positive statistically correlation at the level of 0.01 between DLA and ALA. The Pearson's correlation coefficient is determined ($r = .49$), and ($p < .001$). This clarifies that there is no difference between the two measures, and thus the two abilities are related to each other. When descriptive listening abilities increase, argumentative listening abilities increase too and vice versa.
To determine whether descriptive listening abilities could predict argumentative listening abilities, a simple linear regression is carried out.

### 4.3. Regression Analysis

A bivariate simple linear regression is run to examine how well descriptive listening ability could predict the level of argumentative listening ability. Based on the results displayed in table 4.4 below, it is concluded that descriptive listening can predict 24 percent of S4 learners’ argumentative listening ($R = .49$, $R^2 = .24$). The adjusted $R^2$ value was .240.

#### Table 4.4. Model Summary of DLA and ALA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>$R$</th>
<th>$R$ Square</th>
<th>Adjusted $R$ Square</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.498</td>
<td>.248</td>
<td>.240</td>
<td>3.05691</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Predictors: (Constant), Descriptive Listening Ability.

b. Dependent Variable: Argumentative Listening Ability

Table 4.5 below examines the statistical significance of the regression model. The results $F (1, 90) = 29.69$, $P < .001$ indicates that descriptive listening predicted argumentative listening in a significant way.

#### Table 4.5. ANOVA of DLA and ALA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>277,441</td>
<td>29,690</td>
<td>&lt;.001b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>9,345</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>1118,465</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Dependent Variable: ALA

b. Predictors: (Constant), DLA
Moreover, the regression equation for predicting descriptive listening from argumentative listening was \( y = 5.18 + 0.65x \). Furthermore, the beta value of \( B = .49 \) indicates that one full standard deviation’s change in descriptive listening resulted in a .49 standard deviation change in argumentative listening. The results of the t-statistic (\( t = 5.44, p < .001 \)) showed that the beta value enjoyed statistical significance. These results are displayed in table 4.6 below:

**Table 4.6. Coefficients of DLA and ALA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (Constant)</td>
<td>7.208</td>
<td>1.050</td>
<td>6.867</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DLA</td>
<td>.446</td>
<td>.082</td>
<td>5.449</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To sum up, the results showed that the students’ argumentative listening scores are slightly higher than their descriptive listening ones. In other words, there is a statistically significant difference between the two means of descriptive listening and argumentative listening, as shown by the results of the paired-samples t-test \( t(91) = -1.11, p < .001 \). Therefore, the correlational results demonstrated that the relationship between descriptive listening ability and argumentative listening ability was positive and linear. There was a statistically significant positive correlation between DLA and ALA, \( r = .49, p < .001 \). Moreover, the regression analysis showed that DLA predicted ALA in a statistically significant way. The \( R^2 \) for this equation was .24. That is, 24% of the variance in argumentative listening ability was predicted from the level of descriptive listening.

The results displayed in the previous section showed a significant difference between descriptive and argumentative listening as well as a significant positive correlation between the two sets of data. Moreover, the significant difference between descriptive and argumentative abilities in listening could be due to many reasons. Learners’ exposure to argumentative listening texts more than descriptive ones in previous learning stages may be one reason. Consequently, students do not have enough sub-skills to comprehend descriptive texts. Another explanation for the difference between the two genres is that descriptive texts are full of abstract words and detailed information that a listener can miss while listening.

Furthermore, it was concluded that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between the DLA and ALA. Therefore, students who showed a good ability in descriptive listening are likely to possess a good ability in argumentative listening and vice versa. Argumentative listening, then, is significantly predictive of descriptive listening.

As the two modes of discourse are distinctive in nature, it is hard to find attributes of transfer from one mode to another. Thus, these findings can be due to the transfer of listening sub-skills from argumentative to descriptive and vice versa. That is, mastering the listening comprehension sub-skills can contribute to generating higher descriptive and argumentative outcomes. Students who master phonological skills, syntactic skills, inferential skills, textual skills, make appropriate judgments about the message of the speaker and make appropriate responses can effectively understand both descriptive and argumentative texts. However, students who have difficulties in applying these listening sub-skills are likely to have difficulties in comprehending listening texts either in descriptive or argumentative ones.

**5. Conclusions and Implications**

There are many conclusions to draw from the statistical analysis of the current data:

Semester four university students studying in education professional BA degree program are able to comprehend the argumentative discourse more than the descriptive one. The previous results effectively demonstrated that there is a significant difference between the two listening abilities. It might be due to students’ focus on argumentative listening texts more than descriptive ones in the previous study years. This difference may also refer to the complexity of the descriptive genre itself that impedes the comprehension of this listening type.
Another conclusion to draw from this research is that there is a significant positive correlation between the Descriptive Listening Ability (DNA) and the Argumentative Listening Ability (ALA). This means that students who master listening sub-skills can generate a high standard ability in comprehending descriptive discourse as well as argumentative one.

The findings derived from this study enhance a number of implications and recommendations that can help teachers, syllabus designers, also the pedagogical staff in the department of English studies to ameliorate the teaching of the listening comprehension skill. They can be summarized as follows:

1- Teachers need to stimulate and nourish students’ interest and motivation in listening. They need, for instance, to make the listening practice as lively as possible to ensure student’s interest and motivation. Teachers also need to change their attitudes towards teaching listening and consider it as important in the sense that it should be integrated with other skills like reading, speaking and writing. As a result, students will be encouraged to improve all other skills through listening. Furthermore, teachers need to teach all modes of discourse, especially descriptive and argumentative, to ensure and improve students’ comprehension of listening texts.

2- Syllabus designers, together with the pedagogical staff in the English department studies, are recommended to integrate the listening comprehension course in the BA education program as a single course. The listening syllabus needs to include listening texts with comprehension questions along with texts in different modes of discourse to make students improve their listening first and comprehension of different genres next. When teaching the different modes of discourse, students will master the characteristics of each type, especially the ones they have deficiencies in, such as the descriptive genre in this current study.

Eventually, teaching listening comprehension in descriptive and argumentative modes of discourse will make students studying in the BA education program improve their listening comprehension ability and transfer the learned sub-skills to other skills like reading and writing.

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**References**


