

# Difficulties that Students who Learn Turkish as a Foreign Language Encounter During Listening Skills<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Listening skills play an important role in an individual's communication with others and in their understanding of the environment. Since it provides a basis for the acquisition of language skills it is one of the most important learning tools, and because it is frequently used in everyday life and in the learning process, listening skill is the foreground of foreign language teaching. It is important for students to understand what they listen to in order that they do not encounter any difficulties in the language learning process. To ensure success in the environments where the Turkish language is taught as a foreign language, it is necessary to follow the listening processes of the students attentively and to identify the problems they face during this process. This study aims to identify the listening barriers encountered by university students learning Turkish as a foreign language at level B2, and was designed based on a qualitative research approach and a phenomenological design. Within the scope of the study, eight students studying at Dumlupınar University's TÖMER (Turkish & Foreign Languages Research and Application Center) were identified as participants. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with students included in the sample, and descriptive analysis technique was applied in the analysis of the research data. Participants expressed views that they often encountered problems such as accented speech, frequent use of idioms and proverbs during listening, lack of vocabulary development, and lack of emphasis and voice intonation during speech. Also, factors that make listening easy to understand are identified as the other languages they speak, good vocabulary knowledge, interesting topics, listening to audiovisual elements, and the speaker's use of gestures and mimics.

*Key Words:* Listening difficulties, Listening comprehension, Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language, Phenomenology

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## INTRODUCTION

Changes during the 21st century have added a new dimension to our interaction with the environment in the progress of time. As a result, the need for economic, technologic, politic, social and cultural interaction have increased dramatically. This situation has led people to communicate extensively with other nations, and therefore, the necessity for a foreign language to add to the mother tongue has significantly increased. Just as with a mother tongue, the aim is to develop the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing in foreign language teaching. Listening skill is at the fore of language teaching as it provides a basis for language acquisition, and is frequently used in individual and social relationships. Listening skill is one of the most important means of language learning. Especially at lower levels, it holds importance for the acquisition of target behaviors; that is, students' understanding of what they have listened and not experiencing problems in this process. In learning environments where Turkish is taught as a foreign language, students' listening processes should be tracked attentively and any problems should be detected and addressed in order to obtain the desired level of success.

Turkey is located at the junction of Asia, Europe, and Africa, and hosts different cultures and civilizations due to its geographical location, the increase seen in the number of foreign students studying in Turkish universities, Turkish business' improved foreign relations in terms of economic activity, international institutions, foundations and media. This level of activity and cooperation has brought Turkey frequently to the agenda and as a result, has raised interest towards the learning of Turkish as a foreign language. Turkish has started to be taught as a foreign language in various institutions and organizations throughout Turkey as well as in other countries worldwide. TÖMERs (Turkish Teaching Centers) and Yunus Emre Turkish Culture Centers, founded by the Yunus Emre Institution, are among the most common. In both institutions, "Common European Framework of Reference for Languages" is prepared within the "European Languages Teaching Common Framework Program".

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages presents a framework to researchers and teachers to conduct studies in topics such as language teaching programs in European countries, curricula, exams, and textbooks etc. In addition, it thoroughly explains what foreign language learners should know in order to communicate in the language and which skills and information they should develop in order to be proficient with regards to teaching the culture of the target language. Besides this, it also describes language proficiency levels which enable evaluation of the development of foreign language learners on the grounds of lifelong learning (MoNE, 2009, p. 1). With the determined language proficiency levels, it is aimed at recognition of new levels which will be applicable in all European countries leaving their previously developed language levels behind. In this framework, language proficiency levels are determined on a scale of six levels (A1-A2-B1-B2-C1-C2 - from beginners to advanced). From these levels, a person who is learning at the B2 level would be described as an "independent user" and would be able to communicate naturally and easily and express themselves clearly (MoNE, 2009).

Nowadays, the ability to communicate with individuals who speak another language is accepted as a valuable asset in terms of expanding world perspective through different cultures (Rost, 2014), and recognition of their cultural choices and prejudices (Root, & Ngampornchai, 2013). When studies regarding foreign language learning are analyzed, it is seen that researchers state that listening plays a key role in facilitating foreign language

learning (Dunkel, 1991; Feyten, 1991; Rost, 2011) and they described this skill as being at the heart of foreign language learning (Vandergrift, 2007). Emphasis is also affirmed to the skill of comprehensive listening. Listening skill is firstly used as a means to learn a language and then that language becomes a means to gain other information (Doğan, 2008). Listening skill plays an important role in an individual's relationship with others and endeavors to understand the environment. Individuals enhance their learning thorough listening and gain knowledge in life via listening, right through to the beginning of their academic life.

According to research on the extent that language skills are used in the language learning process, students are found to apply about 50% of their in-class time to listening skill (Imhof, 1998). According to these results, the acquisition of listening skill competency bears great importance in the success of a target behavior.

In previous studies, it is revealed that although listening skill has a major importance to foreign language learners, they cannot just acquire it (Berne, 2004) as it is one of the hardest skills to gain and develop (Graham, 2006), and as a result, they cannot understand what they have listened to. In fact, this result would not surprise teachers. Listening skill is one in which students need to use their mental processes effectively. While the individual's brain is saving the input to short-term memory, it also deals with making sense of the records there (Jiang, 2009). Besides this, factors such as foreign language learners' limited vocabulary in the target language (Stæhr, 2009), different accents they come across (Scales, Wennerstrom, Richard, & Wu, 2006), inability understanding phonological changes, inconsistency between target foreign language and their native language sentence structures (Açık, 2008; İşcan, & Aydın, 2014) uneasiness in dialogue which includes proverbs and idioms, fast speaking and their inability to use their memory effectively (Goh, 1997) should also be considered. However, activities aimed at helping overcome these problems might not be sufficient to remove these obstacles to an individual's listening comprehension process. Therefore, detailed research should be conducted in order to detect the problems of language learners' listening problems.

Carrier (2003) in his research with seven university students learning English as a second language, tried to find out whether or not purposeful listening technique affects students' comprehensive listening competency. In order to use this technique effectively, the researcher prepared and delivered a 15 minute lesson plan. He found a statistically significant difference between students' listening comprehension test points and the pre-test. In this case, it can be said that purposeful listening activities are effective in the development of comprehensive listening skills, and it can be beneficial to use these techniques to improve the listening skill competency of students in foreign language teaching.

In his research with 133 English language native-speaking eighth-grade students learning French as a second language, Vandergrift (2006) developed the hypothesis "inability in listening comprehension skill in foreign language teaching stems from inability in listening comprehension in native language" and "reason of inability in listening comprehension skill in foreign language teaching is due to having insufficient information about that language". The researcher measured listening comprehension skill thorough achievement tests to prove his hypothesis after analysis found that 25% of listening comprehension in foreign language predicts foreign language proficiency and 14% of it predicts listening skill competency in native language.

Stæhr (2009) designed a research study in order to investigate the relationship between vocabulary knowledge in foreign language and listening comprehension skill with 115

students studying at a business school and whose native language is Danish. The researcher assessed vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension skills variables via achievement tests. As a result of the analysis of the collected data, it was revealed that 49% of listening comprehension skill in foreign language is predicted by vocabulary knowledge in foreign language.

Chen (2005, p. 7), in her research which aimed at determining difficulties that foreign language learners encounter while learning listening comprehension strategies, studied 64 university students in Taiwan. She prepared an eight-week "Teaching Listening Comprehension Strategies" and asked students to keep journals in order to collect the necessary data. At the end of the process, Chen conducted unstructured interviews with the students. Based on the collected data, Chen tried to detect what problems, if any, that the students encountered while learning listening strategies. As a result of the research, the problems were defined as "affective barriers, habitual barriers, information processing barriers, English proficiency barriers, strategic barriers, belief barriers and material barriers".

Emiroğlu (2013) investigated the perspectives of 97 preservice Turkish language teachers about listening problems, addressing the question "What are the listening barriers while you are listening to a person?" in order to obtain their views on the topic. As a result, the preservice teachers stated that 58% of listening problems relate to the sender, whilst 21% are from the receiver and 21% from the other problems.

Aşlıoğlu (2009) in his research with 195 university students studying Turkish teaching, the researcher identified teacher candidates' views on listening problems in class and put forward suggestions on the development of listening skills. In the data collection process, a two-point scale (Yes/No) survey consisting of 18 statements was applied. Following the data collection, barriers which obstruct preservice teachers' listening in the classroom environment were categorized as:

*Instructors' long teaching time, insufficient information about the lecture's targets, students' disinterest in lesson subjects, students' dealing with their personal issues, students' role as passive listeners, idea that what instructor is teaching will not be used in the future, some instructors' in class language including some terms and concepts which students do not understand, dislike of asking unclear points, instructors failure in using body language and taking notes of every single point taught in the class." (Aşlıoğlu, 2009, p. 50-51)*

In a theoretical research in which listening problems that foreign language learners encounter were investigated, Rost (2014) considered previous studies on language acquisition and the use of verbal language in trying to reveal factors that lead to success or failure in the acquisition of second language listening skills. These factors were collected under three headings as affective, cognitive, and interpersonal. In this regard, the researcher tried to explain listening problems in second language learning and strategies that individuals proficient in language may develop.

When the results of these various studies in the literature review were considered, it was identified that in an individual's listening comprehension process, problems exist such as 'insufficient level of listening comprehension skills in native language, inadequate information about target foreign language, inadequate vocabulary knowledge, disinterest in topic, insufficient information about the topic and speaker's ineffective use of body language'.

However, on researching the YÖK (Turkish Higher Education Council) National Thesis Center, ULKAKBİM Social Studies, ERIC, and Google Academic databases, no studies were found concerning the listening problems of students learning Turkish as a foreign language. Studies carried out in countries outside Turkey were found to be more theoretical and no detailed study had yet been published.

Especially in environments where Turkish is taught as a foreign language, in order to maintain success and recognize target behavioral changes as a result of effective teaching, it is essential to detect students' listening problems that they encounter, both in their learning process and also in real life. In this way, students will acquire and develop listening skill which is a basis for more successful language teaching. In this regard, the purpose of this study is to identify listening problems that university students who learn Turkish in B2 level encounter and to understand their experiences.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

The phenomenological design was utilized for this research study. It focuses on phenomena that are realized without the need for an in-depth and detailed understanding (Yıldırım, & Şimşek, 2011). There are a total of 44,025 international students studying at state and foundation universities throughout Turkey (ÖSYM, 2013). Although a limited number of studies on the problems faced by these learners of Turkish as a foreign language provide a general idea, there is a need for more in-depth and detailed research on this topic. The data of the study were collected through a semi-structured interview form, which is a qualitative research method technique. Qualitative research is conducted to explore and investigate a problem in order to develop an in-depth understanding of a topic. In this respect, the aims of the research and the research questions are expressed comprehensively so as to learn about the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2012). The research proves to be qualitative if it is sensitive to the natural environment, open to additions and corrections, and the researcher(s) have a participatory role. Qualitative research is also an approach based on inductive and integrative perception of the facts in order to reveal perceptions against stable law concepts (Mayring, 2011; Uzuner, 1997; Yıldırım, & Şimşek, 2011).

### **Participants**

The maximum variation sampling technique, which is one of the purposeful sampling techniques, was employed in the identification of participants for the study. The purpose being to create a relatively small sample and to reflect the diversity of individuals of this sample to the fullest extent (Yıldırım, & Şimşek, 2011). When we select a small sample with maximum diversity, the data collection and analysis process will give two types of findings. These are specific detailed descriptions of every situation, including sampling, and common themes that may arise between situations that are characterized by a large number of different characteristics (Patton, 2001; Yıldırım, & Şimşek, 2011).

International students studying in different departments at Dumlupınar University (DÜ), Turkey, participated in this research. In order to determine the participants, firstly, a letter about the research was written to Dumlupınar University Student Affairs Department requesting the contact information of international students. The DÜ Student Affairs Department provided the researchers with name list of international students studying at the university and informed about the procedure to follow to access the student contact

information. The researchers contacted the student affairs office of each related department in order to receive the student contact information via e-mail. The international students were then telephoned and informed about the research titled “Difficulties that Students who Learn Turkish as a Foreign Language Encounter During Listening Skills”, and asked if they were willing to participate.

Following the phone calls, the eight students were selected as the research sample who were considered most likely to talk about the issue. One female and seven male students formed the sample group. Based on research ethics, participants’ traits are explained, although their names are kept confidential and participants are presented as Participant 1 through to Participant 8.

*Participant 1* came to Turkey from Afghanistan. He was studying in the second grade within the DPÜ’s medical faculty, and had been living in Turkey for three years. His native language is Uzbek, and also knows Turkish, Farsi, Arabic, and Pashto. He completed his secondary and high school education in Farsi. He expressed that he does not have any problems in using the four language skills in either Uzbek or Farsi. He understands Arabic, but has some problems in speaking it, and he can also read and write in Pashto. He received his ‘Turkish as a foreign language’ instruction at Ankara University (AÜ)’s Turkish and Foreign Language Research Center (TÖMER) in Bursa.

*Participant 2* came to Turkey from Albania. He was a first grade Public Administration student at the Faculty of Economics and Administration, and had been living in Turkey for six years. His native language is Albanian, and also knows Turkish plus intermediate level English. He received his ‘Turkish as a foreign language’ instruction at AÜ’s TÖMER in Istanbul.

*Participant 3* came to Turkey from Palestine. He was a first grade student of the Computer Engineering department at the Engineering Faculty, and has been in Turkey for 18 months. His native language is Arabic, and also knows Turkish plus intermediate level English. He received his ‘Turkish as a foreign language’ instruction at AÜ’s TÖMER in Istanbul.

*Participant 4* came to Turkey from Kenya. He was studying in his first grade in the Mathematics Department of the Faculty of Science and Letters, and had been living in Turkey for about 18 months. His mother tongue is Nubi, and also studied English from primary through to high school. Besides Turkish and English, he knows Swahili, Luo, and also intermediate level Arabic. He received his ‘Turkish as a foreign language’ instruction at AÜ’s TÖMER in Istanbul.

*Participant 5* came to Turkey from Tanzania. He was a first grade student from the Chemistry Department of the Faculty of Science and Letters, and had been living in Turkey for about one year. His native language is Swahili, and besides Turkish, he also knows intermediate level English, beginner level Arabic, and has started to learn German. He received his ‘Turkish as a foreign language’ instruction at AÜ’s TÖMER in Istanbul.

*Participant 6* came to Turkey from Senegal. He is enrolled to the English Language and Literature department of the Faculty of Science and Letters, although at the time of this research was studying at the English Preparatory Class in DPÜ’s School of Foreign Languages. He had been living in Turkey for about 18 months. His native language is Pulaar, and studied Arabic during his primary, secondary, and high school education as well as French and

English. In addition to Turkish, he has a good working level in the Wolof language,, in addition to Arabic and French. He received his ‘Turkish as a foreign language’ instruction at a private institution in Istanbul.

*Participant 7* came to Turkey from Iraq. He was a second grade student in the Department of Mining Engineering at the Engineering Faculty. He had been living in Turkey for about three years, and his native language is Arabic.

*Participant 8* came to Turkey from Moldova. She was studying in the second grade of the Industrial Engineering department of the Engineering Faculty, and had been living in Turkey for about 11 years. She has studied in Turkey since fifth grade of primary school. Her native language is Moldovan, and in addition to Turkish, she has a good level of English and beginner level Russian.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, which is a data collection technique in which the researcher asks interviewees previously set open-ended questions (Ayres, 2008). In this technique, questions determined before the interviews are asked to the participants systematically and consistently. However, interviewers are also free to ask follow-up questions in order to analyze in more in detail (Berg, 2000; Patton, 2001; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). As it provides such a degree of flexibility, semi-structured interviews were selected for this research. While preparing the questions developed by the researcher, special attention was paid to principles such as ease of understanding, not being multidimensional, and not being responsive or directing.

The prepared interview questions were presented to four experts for their comment. A pilot study was then conducted in order to test the interview questions. Under the direction of the experts’ recommendations, some changes were made to some questions and one question was added to the semi-structured interview form.

As a result, it was decided to direct the following questions to participants in the semi-structured interview: 1) Can you briefly introduce yourself? 2) What difficulties have you experienced while learning Turkish? 3) What puts a strain on you most when listening to a Turkish speaker? 4) Does changing the speaker’s volume affect your understanding? How? 5) What makes us listen more carefully while listening to a Turkish speaker? 6) In general, what problems do foreigners experience while learning Turkish based on your observations?

The semi-structured interviews were carried out by the researcher. The location where the interviews would be conducted was prepared beforehand, with all necessary devices provided, set and checked in order to mitigate risks of anticipated problems. While directing the interviews, the researchers tried to remain neutral and focus on the target. At the beginning of the semi-structured interviews, they informed the participants about the research, asked them to analyze the questions and took written permission for their voices to be recorded. The semi-structured interviews lasted 128 minutes in total.

Later, the interview recordings were transcribed, which produced 140 pages of data. While transcribing, the students’ and researchers’ speech was typed without change and special attention was given to the correctiveness of the transcription. In order to ensure reliability of the data, recordings were listened to and compared with the transcription by two different experts (Çolak, & Uzuner, 2004). Very small differences between the recordings and

transcriptions were detected and these problems were resolved. During the process in creating subthemes for the collected data, researchers read all the participants' detailed transcriptions and created subthemes. Following this stage, the researchers decided to place all data under two themes, named as 'problems that obstruct listening to understand' and 'factors that ease listening to understand'.

In addition, under the theme of factors that obstruct listening to understand', subthemes were created for 'accented speech', 'idioms and proverbs', 'insufficient vocabulary', 'voice tone', and 'speed of the speaker'; and under the theme of factors that ease listening to understand, subthemes of 'other languages known', 'known word count', 'interest in the subject', 'listening to audiovisual elements', 'speaker's gestures and mimics' were created.

The reliability of the study was calculated using the formula "Reliability = Consensus / (Consensus + Dissensus) × 100" (Miles, & Huberman, 1994). The reliability ratio among the researchers was found to be 90%. Descriptive analysis technique was used to analyze the research data; an analytical technique in which the collected data are summarized and interpreted according to the predetermined themes, and direct quotations are often used to reflect the opinions of the interviewees. The results obtained are interpreted in terms of cause-effect relations (Yıldırım, & Şimşek, 2011).

## FINDINGS

The views of the students learning Turkish as a foreign language on listening problems were collected under two main themes. In this section, opinions of the students are given according to these themes. The views of the students were recorded as they spoke and are quoted directly. In order for the quoted direct citations to not be identifiable, the participants are named as P1 through P8. The views of the participants about the problems which deem it harder to understand what they listen to, and the factors which make it easier to understand what they listen to are as follows.

### Participants' Views About Problems Understanding What They Listen to

All of the students remarked that they had difficulty to understand if the speaker spoke in a local dialect. The participants expressed the following views about this subtheme:

*If the speaker speaks in a dialect, especially of Eastern or Black Sea region, it is a problem. (P3)*

*While in Istanbul the Turkish is a little better. When I came to Kutahya, it is spoken faster and there are things like "biliyor musun" (Do you know that?), "naptin" (How is it going?) and this causes problems. (P4)*

*Everybody, I mean foreign students not only come from Istanbul, but also from cities like Ankara, Samsun, and Antalya. Of course, the student learns Turkish according to the place. For instance, for one year and eight months, I started to speak to them just in the way they do. That's why, when we go somewhere else, we have hard times, as well. Such as accent, dialect... we went to Isparta once. I went there because I had something to do, I asked a couple of questions. They answered but I understood nothing. (P7)*



As it is seen, students expressed that if the speaker had a neutral dialect, it would be easier to understand. They remarked that when the speaker spoke with a local dialect (Black Sea, Aegean, Eastern Anatolia etc.), they had difficulties in understanding what they heard and this negatively affected their educational activities. However, some students expressed they overcame this difficulty in time:

*Depending on the dialect, it varies. It may be hard while listening to someone who is from the Black Sea region. I don't have much trouble with the Aegean accent because I have been around for 2-3 years. I can understand it here. Though it is a little hard, it is not a problem. (P1)*

*I can understand, but when it is with an accent, I have to be more concentrated on it. Aegean accent... Actually I really like to speak with an accent. It is not always hard for me. Just sometimes. A Little. (P8)*

When the characteristics of the participants who expressed that they did not have difficulties when the speaker spoke with a local dialect are considered, it is remarkable that P1 has been in Turkey for three years, and P8 for 11 years, and that P1 also speaks Uzbek. Similar to P1, P7 has been in Turkey for three years but P7 expressed that it is hard to understand a local dialect.

The speaking speed is another area that students considered a higher-level problem in addition to the speaker's dialect. Four participants expressed difficulties in understanding when the speaker spoke too fast. Two of the participants expressed that they used to have the same problem when they started to learn Turkish, but that it was no longer a problem. Some views of the participants about the speaking speed of the speaker are as follows:

*Because of the connections between sentences, if the speaker adds another word before I understand it, but it may cause a little trouble. However, when I listen to a normal speaker, as long as he/she does not use a rare word, I can understand. (P1)*

*While listening, if it is spoken fast, I do not understand but if it is spoken slowly, it is better. (P5)*

*In the beginning, it had to be spoken word by word. I did not used to understand, but it is not a problem for me at the moment. (P8)*

*If it is spoken fast, it matters; but as I mostly speak Turkish and live with Turkish people these days, it is easier. Before, it had to be slower. (P3)*

As seen, some of the participants emphasized that the speaker had to speak word by word, and slowly. Other participants remarked that they used to have some problems when they started to learn Turkish, but that they are now over it as they have lived in an environment with Turkish speaking individuals. Some of the students remarked that fast or slow speaking had no effect on understanding what they listened to. Participants' views on this are as follows:

*It does not matter if he/she speaks fast or slow, I am not affected. (P2)*

*No, it is not a problem if it is fast or slow. I understand. (P6)*

*For example there are many people who speak very fast but I understand. Of course I do not understand every single word, but I understand the most common ones. I understand everything in the class, though. (P7)*

Another problem they experienced while listening was insufficient vocabulary knowledge. Three participants expressed that they had difficulty in understanding as they did not know the meaning of some words:

*I may have hard times with rare words that are not used in daily life. I may not get the meaning. Except for that, it is not that hard for me. (P1)*

*When elders speak, they use Ottoman words. I sometimes do not understand some things like for example instead of the word "ölmek" (to die) they use "vefat etmek" (to pass away) or "ruhunu verdi"(he gave his soul). (P4)*

*The hardest part in learning Turkish is the vocabulary, because some words do not exist in our language. Because of that I have some trouble with Turkish. They speak fast and sometimes I understand another meaning of the word. (P5)*

As seen, two participants remarked that they faced difficulties because they did not know the meaning of rare words not used in daily life. One participant expressed that since his vocabulary knowledge is weak, he can be confused as to the meaning of some words. As an addition to these views, one participant expressed that the words learned would be forgotten in places where less Turkish was spoken and that situation made it hard to understand:

*In the course, some may speak Turkish quickly, whereas some may not just because they use their mother language mostly. If we speak our own mother language, we forget some Turkish words. Now, I use English so speaking English when I turn to Turkish, I forget some Turkish words and I have hard times in speaking and listening. (P4)*

Idioms and proverbs are also among the problems that participants experience while listening. Two of the participants remarked that they had trouble because of Turkish idioms and proverbs used in conversations. Their views are as given as follows:

*If the speaker uses a proverb or an idiom, I hardly understand. I ask myself what it can mean. (P3)*

*I do not understand what they say. For example, these idioms or proverbs. (P6)*

When the views of the participants are investigated, it can be seen that they do not understand a conversation involving idioms or proverbs. When the characteristics of these participants are considered, it is noteworthy that both participants have been living in Turkey for 18 months and that they had their elementary, secondary, and high school education in the Arabic language.

*Another case that the participants perceive as a problem is the length of the speech. One participant remarked that he had difficulty in listening if the speech is long;*

*I attended many conferences and have listened to many speeches at lectures or conferences. The length matters of course. If it is too long, nobody wants to listen. It becomes boring. (P1)*

As seen, the participant emphasized that if the speaking period is long, he gets bored and does not want to listen, and this leads to misunderstanding of what is heard.

## Participants' Views About Factors That Ease Understanding of What They Hear

All of the participants that remarked that if the speaker spoke clearly –adjusted voice level, correct pronunciation, paid attention to emphasis and tone– they would listen to the speaker more carefully and willingly. Participants' views about this subject are as follows:

*Well. I understand better. At a conference, once, one lecturer, I forgot the name, was speaking normally and suddenly he raised his voice and his intonation, he made me listen more carefully and I understood more. (P2)*

*I listen carefully if it is spoken with a soft tone. (P4)*

*Of course speaking slowly is better than speaking loudly. (P7)*

*Let's assume that we are at a conference. If the speaker speaks constantly at a stable level, we cannot pay enough attention. We understand better when the voice is raised. (P8)*

When the views of the participants are investigated, a picture is seen consisting of various views. Some of the participants express that they were disturbed when the speaker has spoken loudly, whereas others expressed that changes in the speaker's voice level made them listen more carefully. When the characteristics of the participants are investigated according to these terms, it is notable that P8 and P2 come from the Balkan states and have lived in Turkey for a longer time than P4 and P7. In addition to these views, one participant emphasized good rhetoric of the speaker and two participants emphasized the gestures and physical appearance of the speaker:

*It depends on the person. Good rhetoric is preferred; like famous speakers. If you do not mind I would like to mention something. For example, the Mayor. I listened to him many times and I want to listen when he speaks. He speaks word by word to the community. Some speakers speak really slowly. (P1)*

*Of course, their gestures also matter. If everything is all right, it is more efficient. Atmosphere, the person, and the subject are important, but harmony makes me listen more carefully. (P2)*

*Hand gestures make me listen more carefully. Facial gestures as well, but it is hard on the phone. (P3)*

According to the participants, besides listening to a well-spoken speaker, the attractiveness of the subject is also another factor that eases understanding of what they listen to. All of the participants remarked that if the subject was interesting they would listen better. Participants commented with the following views about this subtheme:

*If it is about history or soccer, I listen to it better. (P2)*

*If the subject concerns me I will be careful. For example, if someone speaks about Eskisehir I do not care, but if he says Kutahya then I listen because I live in Kutahya. (P4)*

*If the subject draws my attention I try to listen to it of course. (P7)*

*If it draws my attention, it positively affects me... I listen to it more carefully, I ask questions, I try to get information. (P8)*

As seen, the students stated that if the speaker mentions their interests, they listened more carefully; with one participant in-particular expressed that he listened better when the subject was history or soccer.

Just like the attractiveness of a subject, other languages known are also among the factors that ease understanding of what was listened to. Five participants remarked that the other languages they know helped them while listening. Views of the participants on this are as follows:

*For example, I know Uzbek. While listening to Turkish, there are some similar words. They are used both here and there. This is very interesting. For example, many words of Persian can also be found in Turkish. As I know the meaning already, it helps me. In other words, knowing another language helps you. (P1)*

*It is easier for me to listen when some Arabic words are used. (P3)*

*Since I know Arabic, Turkish becomes easier for me because there are a lot of words that come from Arabic. (P6)*

*I think my mother language and also English helps me. Some concepts are very similar. (P8)*

When the views of the participants are considered, it is notable that particularly the students who know Arabic and Persian expressed their opinions on this subject. The views of P8, who has knowledge of both Moldovan and English, expressed that it helped him to understand.

According to the participants, listening to audiovisual elements is also among the factors that ease understanding of what they listen to. Five of the participants expressed that they had less difficulties as they quite often listened to audiovisual elements. Views of these participants are as follows:

*I like reading newspapers. I like watching TV. When I listen to the radio or watch TV, I learn some words and I then understand better. (P4)*

*Watching Turkish TV channels has taught me vocabulary. As I listened to them, others became easier. (P6)*

*The more I speak Turkish, watch Turkish TV, and listen to Turkish music, the more benefit I get. That is what I did. My roommates even deleted the channels in my language when I first came. (P7)*

As can be seen, the students remarked that they learned vocabulary by listening to audiovisual elements and expressed that they understood better through this. They particularly emphasized the effects of TV and radio. It is notable that the participants used TV and radio as language learning tools – P4 remarked that he followed the changing dynamics of Turkish language through TV and radio. In addition to these views, some students remarked that a good vocabulary made understanding easier:

*If you memorize more words, it will be easier. This is the most important point in learning a language. (P1)*

*It depends on how much Turkish you have learned. It depends on how much grammar you know. For example, there are a lot of fast speaking people around me but I*

*understand. Not every single word, but most of them. I understand everything in the class though. (P7)*

Among the participants, one of them remarked that living in an environment where Turkish is spoken helped listening skills. The views of this participant were as follows:

*It matters when it is spoken fast, but as I speak mostly Turkish and I live with Turkish people these days, I can understand easily now. (P3)*

As seen, P3 emphasizes that he can understand Turkish since he lives in a Turkish speaking environment.

## RESULT, DISCUSSION, AND SUGGESTIONS

This research has confirmed that students who learn Turkish as a foreign language experience some trouble in understanding what they listen to. In this context, the views of the participants about their listening problems were grouped under two themes; factors that make it harder to understand what they listen to, and the factors which make it easier to understand what they listen to. It has been confirmed that the participants had difficulties understanding what they listened to when it was spoken with a dialect, when idioms and proverbs were used, when the speaker spoke fast, when their vocabulary knowledge was insufficient, and when the voice of the speaker was lacking. In the same way, factors such as other languages known, the number of known vocabulary, the attractiveness of the subject, listening to audiovisual material, and the movements and gestures of the speaker all make listening easier, and the subthemes of the factors that ease understanding of what they listen to have been defined. When the views of the participants are considered, it is obvious that some of the listening ease or difficulty originates from the speaker and some from the participants themselves. These results match the results of similar studies (Aşılıoğlu, 2009; Bonk, 2000; Chen, 2005; Crowther, Isaacs, Trofimovich, & Saito, 2015; Emiroğlu, 2013; Kobaleva, 2012; Rost, 2014; Stæhr, 2009; Vandergrift, 2006) found in the literature.

Through Vandergrift's (2006) research with 133 eighth-grade students whose mother language is English and who were learning French as a foreign language, Vandergrift confirmed the hypothesis of "In learning a foreign language, the insufficiency of listening skills is caused by the insufficiency of listening skills in their own mother language", and "In learning a foreign language, the cause of the insufficiency in listening skills is the insufficient information about the foreign language which is being learned". When the results of this current study are considered, it is obvious that the mother language of participants and the other languages that they learned before ease their understanding of what they listen to.

In the process of learning a foreign language, individuals make connections between their own thoughts and the language that they learn through words. As the number of words learned increases, so does the connection between thoughts and the language being learned. Therefore, the language which is learned can be used efficiently on all four language skills. When the vocabulary knowledge of an individual remains insufficient, this may result in failure to learn, and so for this reason, vocabulary knowledge is of great importance. As confirmed by the study of Stæhr (2009), which aimed to determine the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and listening skills, 49% of the listening skills for a foreign language are predicted by the vocabulary knowledge variable. In his research, Bonk (2000) detected a meaningful relationship between the number of known words and listening skills. Also, Kobaleva's (2012) research with students who were learning English as a foreign language

expressed that unknown words block the process of understanding what is listened to. Similarly, in this current research, it has been confirmed that students who learn Turkish as a foreign language have hard times while listening to conversations that contain idioms, proverbs, and unknown words. In this context, the results of the current research match other studies in the literature.

Concentration of the individual whilst listening and receiving a message clearly depends on several variables, and among these variables, the subject of the speech is of great significance. If the subject is attractive, concentration of the individual learning a new language will be easier. Crowther et al. (2015) confirmed in their research that the subject and the speaker significantly affect listening effort. When the findings of this current research are studied, it is observed that when the speaker has an interesting subject, the individuals learning Turkish as a foreign language listen more carefully and attentively and are therefore better able to express what they had listened to. In this context, it is clear that this finding supports the body of literature.

In the process of learning a foreign language, body language is often used as a common communication tool in order to ease the learning process and to improve the academic achievement (Eryalçın, 2006; Göçmenler, 2011). In speeches in which body language and gestures are used effectively, individuals are expected to understand what they listen to more efficiently. In research conducted with 42 people learning English as a foreign language, Sueyoshi and Hardison (2005) confirmed that participants understood what they listened to during speeches in which gestures took place. Goldin-Meadow and Alibali (2013) also stated that gestures and mimics provide the basis for creating a language in interpersonal communication. In this current study with students learning Turkish as a foreign language, the participants also expressed that they more easily listened to speeches in which gestures were used. In this context, it is clear that the findings of the research match other research results found in the literature.

Audiovisual elements produced thanks to advances in technology have a significant role in 21st century life. Especially when considered in terms of possible effects on educational processes, it can be said that audiovisuals provide good results within the language learning process. In a study of 171 university students learning French as a foreign language, Jones (2003) confirmed by quantitative evidence that the usage of audiovisual elements during efforts to understand what the students listened to both developed their listening skills and vocabulary knowledge. Center, Freeman, Robertson, and Outhred (1999), in their experimental research conducted with 66 second grade students, also affirmed that visual animation efforts developed listening skills of students. When the results of these researches are considered, audiovisual elements are shown to play a significant role in the process of understanding is being listened to. The findings which have been reached in the context of the research verify this thesis.

In this current research, which aimed to determine the difficulties that students encounter in the process of learning Turkish as a foreign language, the following points are suggested:

- It is thought that audiovisual elements provide good results in the process of learning a language. Therefore, in institutions where Turkish is taught as a foreign language, students need to be supplied with audiovisual elements in addition to the course books provided.

- Students who learn Turkish as a foreign language expressed that they listened more efficiently when the subject was interesting. In this context, it will be useful to choose subjects which may draw learners' attention and make them curious. In addition, teachers should use body language and gestures in order to inculcate a qualified listening process.
- As the number of words learned increases, learning of a language becomes easier. Therefore, it is thought that in order to succeed in efforts to understand both what learners listen to and what they read, teaching vocabulary has to gain more prominence in organizations where Turkish is taught as a foreign language.
- Students who learn Turkish as a foreign language expressed that they had difficulties in dialogues that contained proverbs and idioms. Such words or expressions, which may remain abstract in the mind of an individual compared to the words more commonly used in daily life, are also needed to be taught. In this context, it can be said that besides teaching vocabulary, teaching proverbs and idioms has to be included as well, supported with audiovisual elements.

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