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### Listening comprehension: Why is it so difficult for L2 test-takers?

*Elisabeth Apostolou*

The assessment of listening comprehension has received little attention in comparison to the other three language abilities, i.e., reading, writing and speaking. For this reason, the factors that make listening difficult for L2 test-takers remain largely unobserved. Up until now, reading assessment research has informed most studies on listening comprehension difficulty, which have been of two general kinds: a) quantitative studies that have mainly drawn their findings by examining test scores through psychometric measurement tools, such as classical item analysis (Buck & Tatsuoka, 1998; Freedle & Kostin, 1996; 1999; Rupp, Garcia & Jamieson, 2001) and b) qualitative studies that have analyzed the L2 learners' perceptions of task and text difficulty (Buck, 1991; Lotsfi, 2012; Yi'an, 1998). Moreover, the focus of the specific studies has been either on the multiple choice or completion item type.

The present paper draws on the findings of a recently finished thesis which investigates listening comprehension test difficulty both from the perspective of the test as well as from the listener's perspective. Therefore, unlike previous research, it combines quantitative and qualitative research methods to provide evidence with regard to the effect of specific difficulty variables on listening test performance. In doing so, its main outcome was the development of a Task Difficulty Typology resulting from the investigation of difficult test items and their relevant oral texts, as well as from analysis of the L2 listeners' perceptions of test difficulty.

By providing descriptors of difficulty relevant to item type and oral text, the specific Typology can serve as an inventory for item writers and test designers to produce future listening comprehension tests of an appropriate difficulty for the exam level assessed. Furthermore, it could be a valuable tool for test strategy instruction in the EFL classroom as a means of overcoming item- or text-related difficulties. Thus, knowing the kind of factors that can affect test performance will enable teachers to enhance their students' overall listening comprehension abilities in the foreign language.

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