

Structured Transcript Use in L2 Listening: Comprehension, Vocabulary, and Confidence

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Listening to authentic spoken language can be especially demanding for learners in intensive language programs. Learners are often expected to follow rapid speech, recognize unfamiliar vocabulary, and make sense of the overall message at the same time. This action inquiry project involved 12 students in the same Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) course at DLIFLC, with students representing different levels of listening proficiency. The project examined how these military language learners experienced a structured approach to transcript-supported listening, with particular attention to their perceptions of comprehension, vocabulary retention, and confidence. To help address these challenges, transcripts were built into listening activities using a structured approach. Students first listened to the audio to understand the main idea. Afterward, they used the transcript to confirm their understanding and examine the content more closely. Student feedback was collected anonymously through Microsoft Forms and indicated that students perceived the transcripts as helpful for understanding the audio and remembering new vocabulary. Many students also reported that having access to the transcript made difficult listening tasks easier to work through and increased their confidence when listening to unfamiliar material. Students reported that when the transcript came later, they could focus on understanding the main idea first and use the written text afterward to check what they had heard. This feedback supports using transcripts at selected stages of a listening activity rather than throughout the entire task. Pedagogically, instructors can use delayed transcripts to support comprehension without replacing independent listening practice.

Keywords: *Listening Comprehension, Vocabulary Development, Learner Confidence, Transcript-Supported Listening, Structured Transcript Use*

BACKGROUND

Listening is a difficult skill for second language (L2) learners. They have to deal with unfamiliar sounds, new vocabulary, and overall meaning all at once, which can be especially difficult under pressure. Goh (2023) noted that learners often struggle to recognize words in connected speech and quickly apply their vocabulary and grammar knowledge to understand what they hear.

At the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC), the pace of instruction can make these listening problems harder to manage. As part of their listening instruction, students are regularly exposed to authentic audio that reflects natural, native-speaker speech, reduced forms, different accents, and even culturally specific expressions. Although this exposure is essential for developing proficiency, it can also make listening more challenging. Even intermediate and higher-performing students can struggle as it becomes more complex. Faiz (2023) examined the relationship between learner autonomy and listening and reading achievement among 86 military learners of Arabic. The students' mean scores on the In-Course Proficiency Test (ICPT) were 74.90 in listening and 84.08 in reading. Because the study compared only these two skills, the results cannot establish that listening was the hardest skill at DLIFLC. They do show that the listening average was lower for this group of Arabic learners. Kazemi (2026) examined a different aspect of listening among Persian learners. He focused on the problems students experienced when processing speech in real time and used a six-step approach to teach them to break spoken sentences into smaller units and recognize their structure.

Transcripts are commonly used during listening activities, yet students may depend on the written text when it is available while the audio is playing. Instead of working through what they hear, they may follow the transcript. For this reason, decisions about how and when to use transcripts matter. Hartshorn and Stephens (2023) examined the use of transcripts during repeated listening and found that learners benefited from having the written text as part of the listening process. Qiao and Chen (2023), however, reported different experiences among the L2 learners in their study. Some students had trouble listening to the audio while reading the live transcript. Errors in the transcript and delays between speech and text made the task harder. Students also worried that frequent use might cause them to depend on the written text. Qiao and Chen recommended reducing transcript access over time and adjusting the amount of support to students' needs. These concerns informed the present project, in which students listened to the audio before receiving the transcript.

Written support can further help students work with unfamiliar vocabulary. Wei and Fan (2022) found that seeing text along with spoken language can support vocabulary learning. The timing of that support, however, may be just as important. Benati (2023) and Pourtousi (2022) suggest that learners generally attend to meaning first, which provides a reason for introducing the transcript after students have already worked with the audio. Together, this research informed the sequence used in the present project. Students' perceptions of this sequence in relation to listening comprehension, vocabulary retention, and confidence were gathered and analyzed.

Although previous research supports transcript-assisted listening and structured listening instruction, considerably less is known about how military learners of Arabic at DLIFLC perceive the use of transcripts when access to the written text is deliberately delayed until after initial listening. Existing DLIFLC scholarship establishes the importance of Arabic listening and structured approaches to listening instruction, while broader second language acquisition (SLA) research identifies potential benefits associated with transcript support. The present action inquiry project builds on these areas by examining students' reported experiences with a structured listen-first, transcript-later approach, particularly their perceptions of comprehension, vocabulary retention, and confidence.

Research Questions

This project focused on the following questions:

1. How do students perceive the use of structured transcript support in helping them understand spoken Arabic during listening activities?
2. How do students perceive the use of structured transcript support in helping them retain vocabulary encountered during listening activities?
3. How do students perceive the role of structured transcript support in building their confidence during listening activities?

In L2 listening, the timing of giving learners the transcript is an important consideration that could affect the way they approach the task. Instead of being given the written text at the onset of the task, learners can process the listening material before receiving the transcript. As a matter of fact, Kajiura et al. (2025) found advantages when transcript reading and listening were done separately rather than together. This allows learners to work through the spoken material without immediately depending on the written text. The transcript can then provide an opportunity to return to the material and examine unfamiliar vocabulary and expressions. In a related study, Hartshorn and Stephens (2023) examined repeated listening in which students listened to the audio before working with the transcript. Their study points to the timing of the transcript as an important part of the listening activity. Used this way, the written text comes after students have already tried to understand the audio on their own.

ACTION PLAN

Context

This project involved 12 adult military L2 learners enrolled in the Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) basic program at DLIFLC. All students were enrolled in the same intensive course, and none were native Arabic speakers or heritage learners. Listening was an instructional priority for the entire class as students continued developing their ability to process spoken Arabic. Daily classroom listening activities often involved authentic or near-authentic audio under time pressure,

requiring students to work through unfamiliar vocabulary, rapid speech, reduced forms, and culturally specific expressions.

The project followed U.S. Army and DLIFLC Human Research Protections Program guidance and received supervisory approval before data were collected. The transcript-supported listening activities were incorporated into regular classroom instruction. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and students were informed that choosing not to participate would have no effect on their grades or instruction. Of the 12 students invited to complete the survey, 11 participated, and one declined. Survey responses were collected anonymously without names, email addresses, or other identifying information.

Actions Taken

The transcript activities were introduced during Semester 2 as part of the students' regular MSA listening instruction. The students typically received two to three listening-comprehension hours each day, but those hours were divided among teachers according to the teaching rotation. For this project, I used the structured transcript approach during the listening hours assigned to me. Students worked with the audio for overall meaning first, followed by a closer review using the transcript. Because teaching assignments varied according to the instructional rotation, the project activities did not occur a fixed number of times each day. During the instructor's assigned listening hours, the structured listen-first, transcript-later procedure was used with the selected listening activities.

The listening materials were generally within Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Levels 1 to 2 and covered a range of Final Learning Objective (FLO) topics. Individual audio selections did not exceed approximately two minutes and were drawn from a combination of DLIFLC curriculum materials, the Global Language Online Support System (GLOSS), authentic media, and instructor-selected materials. All materials were in MSA.

Students worked with each listening passage in stages. They began with the audio only and listened for the topic, main idea, and overall message rather than trying to catch every word. Afterward, I asked students what they thought the passage was about and what main idea they had understood. Their answers were not graded. They listened a second time, again without the transcript, to pick up details they might have missed or change their first answers. Later, students checked the topic, main idea, and details during the transcript review and class discussion.

The transcript was not used until after the second listening. At this point, the class went back to sections of the audio that had caused difficulty and checked them against the written text. This transcript comparison and the instructor-led discussion were used to confirm or correct the topic, main idea, and important details students had identified during the audio-only stages. Some of the problems came from missed words, while others involved unfamiliar vocabulary, expressions, or connectors. These became part of the class review, with the audio replayed when necessary to clarify what had actually been said.

Discussion was used throughout to reinforce learning. These discussions occurred between the instructor and students as part of the classroom listening activity. The instructor asked questions, clarified misunderstandings, and guided students in identifying strategies that could help them process similar listening material. Students shared what they noticed, clarified misunderstandings, and talked through strategies that helped them follow the audio. These conversations also made them more aware of how they approached listening tasks.

The project activities were implemented as a repeated instructional routine rather than as a single isolated activity. The same listen-first, transcript-later sequence was used during the instructor's assigned listening-comprehension hours rather than being limited to one passage or lesson. In each activity, the listening lesson began with audio only. Students were asked to focus on the main idea, key topic, and overall message before paying attention to individual forms. A second listening then gave them an opportunity to confirm or revise that first interpretation. Only after these meaning-focused stages were transcripts introduced. Students then compared their first understanding of the passage with what they found in the transcript. This helped them notice words or phrases they had missed and look more closely at how certain expressions were used.

Vocabulary, key expressions, and recurring connectors were reviewed once students had the transcript in front of them. They also went back to places where what they first understood did not match the spoken text. Written support was not always the same. As students became more familiar with the routine, some activities used a full transcript, while others included only part of the text or key vocabulary. In some cases, students worked without a transcript. This gradual reduction gave students more responsibility for working through the audio independently. Across the activities, the instructional sequence generally followed these steps:

1. Students first listened to the MSA audio without a transcript and focused on the overall meaning.
2. Students listened again to confirm or revise their initial understanding.
3. The transcript was introduced only after the two audio-only listening stages.
4. Under instructor guidance, students compared the spoken and written input and reviewed missed information, vocabulary, expressions, and connectors.
5. As students became familiar with the procedure, written support was reduced in selected activities to encourage greater reliance on listening.

In the DLIFLC setting, where students work through large amounts of challenging material, this sequence provided support without turning the transcript into a substitute for listening.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Approval to use the survey for data collection was obtained through Army Records Management. The survey was sent to all 12 students via Microsoft Forms one day after the project activities ended, while the listening activities were still fresh in their minds. Eleven students responded,

and one chose not to participate. Participation was voluntary and had no effect on students' grades or instruction, and anonymity was maintained by collecting no information that could identify individual students.

The survey had Likert-scale items and three questions that students answered in their own words. The Likert-scale items covered comprehension, vocabulary, confidence, engagement, and students' reported stress during listening activities. The three questions asked students what helped them, what difficulties they had, and what they would change. The survey focused on their experience with the listening activities rather than measuring changes in listening performance or vocabulary learning.

Frequencies and percentages were used to summarize the Likert-scale responses, while the open-ended answers were reviewed for common patterns that helped explain the numerical results. No inferential statistics were used. Appendix A contains the survey items, and the Findings section reports the results.

FINDINGS

Students generally responded positively to the way transcripts were used during the listening activities. Their responses pointed to differences across the areas examined, including comprehension, vocabulary, and confidence. These results come from what students reported on the survey rather than from tests of their listening or vocabulary.

Perceived Support for Listening Comprehension

For RQ1, 85% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that the transcripts supported their understanding of the listening material. Their written comments added more detail to this result. Students described going back to the transcript after listening to check sections they had missed or did not fully understand. The text was used afterward to confirm what they thought they had heard and clear up parts of the audio that were unclear.

What stood out was how students used the transcript once it became available. They had already worked through the audio on their own, so the text helped them check what they had heard rather than guide them through the passage. This order was viewed as effective by 78% of the students who responded.

Perceived Vocabulary Retention Support

RQ2 focused on how students experienced vocabulary during the listening activities. Students first encountered unfamiliar words through the audio and later saw them in the transcript. For 82% of the students, this process helped them remember new vocabulary. Their comments provided some context for this response, particularly by showing how words were used in the passage and noting expressions or patterns that recurred. Vocabulary was not tested separately,

however, so this finding reflects what students reported rather than a measured change in vocabulary knowledge.

Perceived Increase in Listening Confidence

In relation to RQ3, 81% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they felt more confident when listening to unfamiliar material after participating in the transcript-supported activities. Students' responses suggested that being able to check difficult portions of the audio after first attempting to understand them through listening contributed to their confidence when working with unfamiliar material.

Students also reported that the activities felt less overwhelming when transcript support was available after listening. This result provides additional context for how students experienced the structured activities, but it was not treated as a separate construct.

In general, the survey results were favorable across all three areas considered in the research questions. Students also responded favorably to the listen-first, transcript-later sequence. These results reflect students' experiences with the instructional strategy and cannot be used to establish cause-and-effect relationships or measurable improvement.

DISCUSSION

The listening took place before the transcript was introduced, with the initial focus on understanding the message. Vocabulary, expressions, and missing information were addressed afterward when the written text became available. The process is in accordance with the meaning-before-form approach explained by Benati (2023) and Pourtousi (2022). Such an approach was perceived as being effective for 78% of the students. This percentage shows how the students felt about the method and not how their listening ability had changed. Kajiura et al. (2025) also found some advantages to presenting listening and the transcript sequentially.

The findings are particularly relevant in the DLIFLC setting, where students regularly work with authentic material within an intensive instructional schedule. Support is often necessary, but the larger goal is for students to become less dependent on it over time. Faiz (2023) examined listening development among military learners of Arabic, while Kazemi (2026) used structured listening with military language learners. The transcript activities used here approached that instructional challenge differently by giving students written support only after they had worked with the audio.

The students' experiences with transcript use can also be considered in relation to other L2 research. According to Hartshorn and Stephens (2023), transcripts helped learners connect spoken language with its written form, as reflected in how students in this inquiry used the transcript to check parts of the audio they had missed. Vocabulary followed much the same pattern. Students described hearing words first and then seeing them in writing as helpful for

remembering vocabulary, which relates to Wei and Fan's (2022) work on combined auditory and written input. Students reported greater confidence as well, with 81% indicating that they felt more comfortable listening to unfamiliar material after using the structured transcript activities.

The use of transcripts is not always easy for learners. In Qiao and Chen's (2023) study, some students found it difficult to follow the audio while referring to the transcript. Additionally, learners experienced technical difficulties and expressed concerns about becoming overly reliant on the written text. Teachers must then decide when written support should be provided and how long students may need it. In this project, learners were not given the transcript from the beginning, which allowed them to work with the audio before turning to written support.

This action inquiry offers a classroom view of how structured transcripts worked for military learners of MSA. Most students responded positively when the transcript followed the initial listening, suggesting that written support can have a useful place in intensive listening instruction. Because the results represent students' experiences rather than measured changes in performance, future classroom research could examine whether these perceptions are accompanied by changes in listening or vocabulary outcomes.

Future research could examine the gradual reduction of transcript support more systematically by comparing students' performance across activities using full transcripts, partial support, and no transcript. Adding direct measures of listening performance and vocabulary learning would provide another source of evidence alongside students' survey responses. This would make it possible to examine whether the experiences reported in this project are reflected in actual listening performance and vocabulary learning.

CONCLUSION

In listening instruction, access to written support does not necessarily mean that it needs to be available from the beginning. For the students in this project, working with the audio first gave them an initial attempt at understanding the passage before the transcript was introduced. Once available, the transcript helped them return to missed information and unfamiliar vocabulary. Students also reported feeling more confident and less overwhelmed with this approach. These experiences point to the value of using transcripts selectively, particularly as support that follows listening rather than accompanying it from the start.

For listening instruction at DLIFLC, this approach can provide support without taking away the initial challenge of working through spoken language independently. Students still have to rely on what they hear first, but the transcript is available later when they need to check or clarify their understanding. As students become more comfortable with this process, the amount of written support can be reduced so that they gradually take on more of the listening task on their own.

The project is limited by its small sample size and its reliance on students' perceptions, so the findings should be interpreted with caution. Because listening performance and vocabulary retention were not directly measured, the findings cannot establish that these project activities caused learning gains. Hartshorn and Stephens (2023) examined transcript use through a structured repeated-listening sequence and measured listening comprehension directly. Learners who received transcript support outperformed those in the comparison group. This paper instead provides evidence of how participating students experienced the structured use of transcripts during their MSA listening instruction. Still, the findings provide useful classroom-based direction for refining listening instruction in an intensive language-learning environment.

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APPENDIX

Student Feedback Survey Questions

1. Listening first without transcripts helped me focus on the overall meaning.
2. Reviewing transcripts after listening clarified parts I did not initially understand.
3. Transcript-based activities helped me notice how words are used in context.
4. Seeing and hearing new vocabulary at the same time helped me remember words better.
5. Transcripts reduced my stress during listening activities.
6. Transcript activities made listening lessons more engaging.
7. I feel more confident listening to audio in the target language after doing these activities.
8. The balance between listening first and reading later was effective.
9. What aspects of transcript use were most helpful for your learning?
10. What challenges did you experience when using transcripts?
11. How could transcript-supported listening activities be improved?

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