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Rethinking Listening Assessment In Digital And Sociocognitive Contexts

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Abstract: Traditional approaches to listening assessment have been increasingly criticised for focusing on surface comprehension and discrete language elements. Such approaches often fail to capture the cognitive and social complexity of listening in real academic contexts. In response to these limitations, recent research has proposed a shift towards a socio-cognitive model of assessment, in which listening is viewed as a process shaped by cognitive processing, task demands and contextual factors. This article reviews key developments in the reconceptualisation of listening assessment through three complementary perspectives. First, it examines the theoretical redefinition of academic listening, highlighting the role of mental model construction, multimodal input, and L2–L2 interaction in higher education contexts. Second, it discusses Dynamic Assessment (DA) as a process-oriented approach that integrates mediation and scaffolding in order to reveal learners' developmental potential rather than fixed ability. Third, it considers the contribution of computer-based and corpus-informed assessment, including interactive task formats and statistical techniques for detecting bias and ensuring fairness.

Across these perspectives, several emerging trends are identified, namely increased interactivity, the use of multimodality, the application of corpus-based technologies for bias detection and the growing blurring of boundaries between learning and testing. The article concludes by arguing for the development of listening assessment systems that are both fair and diagnostic and that better reflect the cognitive and social realities of contemporary academic listening.

Keywords: Listening Assessment, Academic Listening, Socio-cognitive Framework, Dynamic Assessment (DA), Computer-based Testing, Multimodality.

Introduction: Listening assessment has traditionally been dominated by test formats such as dictation, multiple-choice questions and short answer tasks. These approaches primarily focus on the accurate recognition of words and

details, often treating listening as a passive and individual skill. As a result, they provide limited diagnostic information about how meaning is constructed during listening and fail to reflect the complexity of listening in real academic contexts. This limitation has led to growing criticism of traditional listening tests and raised questions about their validity and relevance. In response to these concerns, recent research has proposed a shift towards a socio-cognitive framework of assessment, in which listening is understood as a process shaped by cognitive processing, social interaction and contextual factors. From this perspective, assessment does not simply measure language knowledge, but captures how test-takers engage with tasks, manage cognitive load and respond to contextual demands. This reconceptualisation highlights the importance of test-taker characteristics, task conditions and the interaction between the listener and the listening text, particularly in academic settings.

Despite these theoretical advances, several unresolved issues remain. One key challenge concerns the tension between authenticity and practicality, as fully replicating academic lectures in tests is often constrained by time and format. In addition, the continued dominance of the native speaker norm does not reflect the reality of global academic communication, where listening frequently involves L2–L2 interaction. Furthermore, existing proficiency frameworks, such as the CEFR, provide limited specification of higher-level (C1/C2) academic listening skills, creating gaps in standardisation and interpretation. Against this background, the present article aims to reconsider listening assessment through three interrelated dimensions: digital transformation, the human factor and the global academic context. Specifically, it examines how computer-based testing, dynamic assessment and socio-cognitive theory contribute to a more interactive, fair and diagnostic approach to assessing listening. The article seeks to address the following question: how can contemporary listening assessment better reflect the cognitive and social realities of academic listening? By synthesising theoretical, methodological and technological perspectives, this study contributes to ongoing discussions on the development of more valid and equitable listening assessment practices.

Literature Review: Research on listening assessment has long pointed to the limitations of traditional testing formats. Conventional listening tests typically position the learner as a passive receiver of information and focus on the final product of comprehension rather than on the process of meaning construction. Such approaches have been criticised for their low cognitive

validity, limited diagnostic value and neglect of the social context and learning potential involved in listening. In recent years, this has led to a broader shift in the literature towards socio-cognitive perspectives, dynamic approaches to assessment and technology-mediated solutions. Accordingly, this review first examines critiques of static listening assessment, then outlines the socio-cognitive framework, explores Dynamic Assessment (DA) and finally considers technological operationalisation and issues of fairness.

A central limitation of traditional static assessment is its exclusive focus on observable outcomes[1]. S. Hidri (2014) argues that static listening tests ignore learners' Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and provide no insight into how understanding can develop with support[2]. Similarly, L. Taylor and A. Geranpayeh (2011) note that conventional tests underestimate the complexity of cognitive processing involved in academic listening and fail to account for contextual influences[3]. From a practical perspective, Cambridge ESOL research (2008) highlights problems related to authenticity, including insufficient representation of spoken language features, mode effects in computer-based tasks and the artificial nature of some testing practices[4]. Together, these studies suggest the need for a revised construct and alternative assessment methods.

The socio-cognitive framework offers a theoretical foundation for this reconceptualisation. According to L. Taylor and A. Geranpayeh (2011), listening assessment should be evaluated through cognitive, contextual and scoring validity. Within this framework, academic listening involves text-level representation, the construction of mental models, the use of multimodal input and engagement with L2–L2 interaction. However, the literature also identifies ongoing challenges, such as the tension between authenticity and practicality, the impact of accent variation and gaps in the specification of CEFR C-level academic listening skills. These issues underline the need for more interactive and context-sensitive assessment designs.

[1] Lantolf, JL, & Poehner, ME. (2010). Dynamic assessment in the classroom: Vygotskian praxis for second language development. Language Teaching Research, 15(1), 11–35.
[2] Hidri, S. (2014). Developing and evaluating a dynamic assessment of listening comprehension in an EFL context (page 4). Language Testing in Asia, 4(4).
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Dynamic Assessment has been proposed as a process-oriented alternative to static testing. Drawing on L. Vygotskian principles[5], S. Hidri (2014) demonstrates how mediation and scaffolding during listening tasks can reveal learners' developmental potential[6]. Concepts such as malleability of ability, microgenesis of listening comprehension and predictive validity based on learner growth support the view of assessment as joint construction of meaning. Despite its diagnostic strengths, DA also raises concerns regarding reliability, subjectivity and teacher resistance, particularly in high-stakes contexts.

Technological developments provide a means to operationalise socio-cognitive principles at scale. Cambridge ESOL (2008) documents the use of computer-based testing, interactive task types and corpus-informed design to enhance authenticity and fairness. Features such as drag-and-drop formats, analysis of lexical density and spoken-ness and Differential Item Functioning (DIF) contribute to more equitable assessment practices. At the same time, structured training frameworks for item writers, such as RITCME, support quality control in test development.

Overall, the reviewed literature shows a clear progression from theoretical reconceptualisation (Taylor & Geranpayeh, 2011), through methodological innovation (Hidri, 2014), to technological implementation (Cambridge ESOL, 2008). Emerging trends include increased interactivity, multimodality, the blurring of boundaries between learning and testing and the use of corpus-based methods to reduce bias. However, gaps remain, particularly in integrating Dynamic Assessment into large-scale testing, understanding the long-term effects of multimodal and L2–L2 input and addressing the role of emerging AI technologies. These gaps provide the rationale for further research in contemporary listening assessment.

Research Methods: This study adopts a qualitative, conceptual research design based on thematic and analytical review of existing literature on listening assessment. Rather than conducting an empirical experiment, the article aims to examine and synthesise key theoretical, methodological and technological approaches to assessing listening. This design is appropriate for addressing the research problem, which concerns the reconceptualisation of listening assessment rather than the measurement of learner performance. The analysis

[5] Vygotsky, L. (1981). Mind in society: The development of higher psychological process. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
[6] Vygotsky, L. (1986). Thought and language. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

draws on three core academic sources that represent complementary perspectives in the field: a socio-cognitive framework of academic listening, a dynamic assessment approach grounded in developmental theory and research reports on computer-based and corpus-informed testing practices. These sources were selected because they directly address the identified research gaps related to cognitive validity, diagnostic assessment and fairness in listening assessment.

The data were analysed using thematic and conceptual analysis. Key concepts, models and assessment practices were identified, compared and grouped into four interrelated analytical dimensions:

1. Interactivity, focusing on active learner participation in listening tasks through Dynamic Assessment and computer-based interfaces;
2. Multimodality, examining the integration of audio, video and visual input as a reflection of authentic academic listening;
3. Corpus-based technologies, considering the use of real language data to enhance authenticity and detect bias in test design;
4. Dynamic Assessment, viewed as an approach that integrates instruction and assessment through mediation and scaffolding.

These dimensions were used as analytical lenses to evaluate how contemporary listening assessment practices address both cognitive and social aspects of listening. To ensure analytical validity, the study is grounded in well-established theoretical frameworks and peer-reviewed research. Conceptual consistency across sources was used as a criterion for interpretation, while contrasting viewpoints were examined to avoid overgeneralisation. Although traditional measures of reliability are not applicable to conceptual research, transparency in source selection and systematic analysis were employed to strengthen the credibility of the findings.

Results and Discussion: The analysis shows that computer-based delivery has significantly reshaped the construct of listening assessment. Traditional linear formats have gradually been replaced by interactive task types, such as drag-and-drop activities, vector-based visual tasks and options allowing answer deselection. These features change the role of the test-taker from passive listener to active decision-maker. As a result, listening is no longer treated as simple recognition of correct answers, but as engagement with task design and interface.

Corpus-informed research further supports this transformation. Studies on lexical density and spoken-ness demonstrate the need to align listening texts with authentic spoken discourse rather than written-like scripts. In addition, Differential Item Functioning (DIF) has been used to detect hidden bias across age groups, contributing to greater fairness. However, operational challenges remain. Mode effects, such as typing versus handwriting during listening-into-writing tasks, differences between headphones and loudspeakers and the artificial practice of double listening raise questions about authenticity and standardisation. Overall, digital platforms increase precision and scalability, but they also require careful validation.

The findings also highlight Dynamic Assessment (DA) as a strong alternative to static, score-based evaluation. Grounded in L. Vygotsky's theory and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), DA shifts the focus from final performance to developmental potential. Through mediation and scaffolding, assessment becomes an interactive process in which understanding is co-constructed. The concept of microgenesis allows researchers to observe how listening comprehension develops within the testing moment itself. Emerging constructs such as malleability of ability and predictive validity through growth further support this perspective. Instead of viewing ability as fixed, DA conceptualises it as flexible and responsive to support. However, this approach also presents challenges. There is a tension between reliability and depth of diagnosis, especially in high-stakes contexts. Issues such as dominance in paired interaction and pedagogical resistance to providing assistance during assessment complicate implementation. Nevertheless, DA illustrates the principle of "assessment as teaching" and represents a move toward integrating learning and testing.

The literature also reveals important changes in the understanding of academic listening in global higher education. L2–L2 interaction has become a common reality, challenging the traditional dominance of the native speaker norm. This shift requires listening tests to reflect diverse accents and communicative contexts. At the same time, multimodal input - including video and visual stimuli - is increasingly recognised as essential for replicating real academic lectures. Another key finding concerns the move from detail-based comprehension tasks to text-level representation. Academic listening involves constructing mental models and understanding the overall logic of a lecture, rather than simply identifying isolated information. However, current

frameworks such as the CEFR provide limited specification of advanced academic listening skills at C-levels, creating gaps in interpretation and standardisation. These findings support the need for a broader and more context-sensitive listening construct.

Across all three perspectives, several common trends emerge. First, interactivity becomes central, whether through computer-based interfaces or through mediation in Dynamic Assessment. The listener is positioned as an active participant rather than a passive receiver. Second, multimodality strengthens authenticity by integrating audio, video and visual input. Third, corpus-based technologies enhance fairness through real language data and systematic bias detection. Most importantly, the boundary between learning and testing is increasingly blurred. Dynamic Assessment represents the most explicit form of this integration, but computer-based interactive formats also support formative potential. Together, these findings suggest that contemporary listening assessment is evolving toward a model that is more interactive, socially grounded and diagnostically informative.

Conclusion: This article has reconsidered listening assessment in response to ongoing concerns about the limitations of traditional testing practices. As discussed throughout the paper, conventional listening tests often focus on the measurement of final outcomes and surface comprehension, without fully addressing the cognitive complexity and social nature of academic listening. Given the changing realities of higher education and global communication, a reconceptualisation of the listening construct is both necessary and timely.

The analysis synthesised three interconnected dimensions. At the theoretical level, the socio-cognitive framework provides a foundation for understanding listening as a process shaped by cognitive processing, contextual factors and interaction. At the methodological level, Dynamic Assessment offers a developmental perspective by focusing on mediation, scaffolding and learner potential rather than fixed ability. At the technological level, computer-based and corpus-informed testing enables the operationalisation of these principles through interactive formats, multimodal input and systematic bias detection. Together, these perspectives confirm a broader evolution in listening assessment: a shift from measuring static performance to diagnosing processes and developmental capacity. This shift emphasises interactivity, authenticity and fairness as central principles of contemporary assessment. Therefore, future listening assessment systems should be designed as integrated,

interactive, and diagnostically meaningful frameworks that reflect the cognitive and social realities of academic practice. Such systems have the potential to align assessment more closely with real-world listening demands while ensuring equity and validity in evaluation.

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