

Liina Karhunen

LISTENING COMPREHENSION SECTIONS IN THE MATRICULATION EXAMINATIONS OF ENGLISH

The Changes in the Recent Years

ABSTRACT

Liina Karhunen: The Listening Comprehension Sections in the Matriculation Examinations of English: The Changes in the Recent Years

Master's Thesis

Tampere University

Master's Programme in Languages

March 2024

The purpose of this Master's thesis was to find out what kinds of changes have been implemented on the listening comprehension sections of the Finnish Matriculation Examinations of English as a foreign language on advanced syllabus level, and what kinds of effects the digitalisation of the Matriculation Examinations has had on them. Special focus was also given to the role of multimodality in the listening comprehension sections.

The study was realised by analysing the listening comprehension sections of eight randomly selected matriculation examinations of English as a foreign language that were held between the years 2016 and 2022. The eight listening comprehension sections were analysed by using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

The results indicated that there have been significant changes on the listening comprehension sections of the matriculation examinations implemented during the examined period. The most important changes that were observed and that were probably at least partly due to the change in the format of the examination included the changes made to the structure of the examination, the employment of numerous new types of listening comprehension material, including multimodal material in the form of videos and images, the lengthier and more detailed instructions to answering the questions, and new types of answer options. Other changes that were observed, and that were not necessarily strictly related to the format of the examination, included the changes in the question words utilised in the questions, the increase in the use of authentic language input as listening comprehension material, and a wider variety of accents in the listening comprehension material.

This thesis presented an overall view of the advanced syllabus level listening comprehension sections of the matriculation examinations of English as a foreign language in the recent years and what kinds of changes they have gone through. In future studies, it would be useful to expand on the topic, broadening the research to also cover the written parts of the matriculation examinations as well as the basic syllabus level matriculation examinations.

Keywords: listening comprehension, matriculation examination, multimodality

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Liina Karhunen: The Listening Comprehension Sections in the Matriculation Examinations of English: The Changes in the Recent Years

Pro Gradu -tutkielma

Tampereen yliopisto

Kielten maisteriohjelma

Maaliskuu 2024

Tämän tutkielman tarkoitus oli selvittää, millaisia muutoksia suomalaisen ylioppilastutkinnon englannin pitkän oppimäärän ylioppilaskokeen kuullunymmärtämisosioihin on tehty, ja miten ylioppilaskokeiden sähköistyminen on vaikuttanut niihin. Erityisesti huomiota kohdistettiin siihen, millainen rooli multimodaalisuuden käsitteellä on kuullunymmärtämisosioissa.

Tutkimus toteutettiin analysoimalla kahdeksaa sattumanvaraisesti valittua vuosien 2016 ja 2022 välillä pidetyn ylioppilaskokeen kuullunymmärtämisosiota. Näitä kahdeksaa kuullunymmärtämisosiota analysoitiin käyttäen sekä kvantitatiivisia että kvalitatiivisia menetelmiä.

Tulokset osoittivat, että tutkitun ajanjakson aikana ylioppilaskokeiden kuullunymmärtämisosiot ovat läpikäyneet merkittäviä muutoksia. Huomattavimmat muutokset, jotka todennäköisesti ainakin osin johtuvat ylioppilaskokeiden sähköistymisestä, liittyivät kuullunymmärtämisosion rakenteeseen, uudentyyppisten kuullunymmärtämismateriaalien, kuten kuvien ja videoiden kokeeseen sisällyttämiseen, vastausohjeiden pitenemiseen ja tarkentumiseen, sekä uudentyyppisiin vastausvaihtoehtoihin. Muita havaittuja muutoksia olivat muutokset eri kysymyssanojen käytössä, autenttisen kielimateriaalin osuuden lisääntyminen kuullunymmärtämismateriaalissa, sekä aiempaa laajempi kirjo eri aksentteja äänitteissä. Nämä muutokset eivät välttämättä liity suoraan kokeiden sähköistymiseen.

Tämä tutkielma tarjosi yleiskuvan pitkän englannin ylioppilaskokeiden kuullunymmärtämisosioista viime vuosina ja siitä, millaisia muutoksia ne ovat läpikäyneet. Tulevissa tutkimuksissa olisi hyödyllistä jatkaa aiheen tutkimista, ja laajentaa tutkimusta koskemaan myös niin ylioppilaskokeiden kirjallisia osioita, kuin erilaajuisten oppimäärien ylioppilaskokeita.

Avainsanat: kuullun ymmärtäminen, ylioppilaskirjoitukset, multimodaalisuus

Tämän julkaisun alkuperäisyys on tarkastettu Turnitin OriginalityCheck -ohjelmalla.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Taking Matriculation Examinations is an important part of many Finnish adolescents' education and in many cases it even has the potential to determine whether they are accepted to a study programme in higher education such as university or university of applied sciences. Because they are such high-stakes examinations, it is undoubtedly important to continuously study and develop them to be as good and functional as possible. The Finnish Matriculation Examinations have taken place biannually for decades, and naturally as a result from having existed for such a long time they have also gone through numerous changes. Perhaps one of the most considerable of these changes was the digitalisation of the examinations, which took place in phases during the years 2016 through 2018. What this meant in practice was that the matriculation examinations that were previously taken by writing the answers on paper with a pen or pencil were afterwards completed entirely in a digital format, i.e. on a computer. At the same time, the format in which the questions were presented changed similarly.

Without a doubt the examinations of all subjects went through transformations during the digitalisation process, and this is also the case for the Matriculation Examination of English as a foreign language. In the current thesis my purpose is to examine the changes made to it, specifically concentrating on the listening comprehension part. My aim is to cover a list of relevant items, including the structure of the listening comprehension sections, multimodality in the listening comprehension sections, the material provided for the listening comprehension questions, the answering instructions, the format of the questions, the different answer options for multiple-choice questions, and the different accents included in the listening comprehension material. The most important research questions that I aim to find answers for are the following:

1. What kinds of changes have the listening comprehension parts of matriculation examinations of English as a foreign language gone through in the recent years surrounding their digitalisation?
2. What is the role of multimodality in the listening comprehension examinations, and how has it changed as a result of the digitalisation process?

In this thesis, my goal is to find answers for these questions by observing the listening comprehension parts of eight matriculation examinations of English as a foreign language. I will begin the thesis by introducing some theoretical background that is relevant to the topic. First, I will briefly explain what the general upper secondary education in Finland is like and discuss some theory behind the Finnish matriculation examinations in general, as well as specifically the matriculation examinations of English as a foreign language. Although the topic of my thesis strictly concerns language testing, some theory on language teaching is also briefly touched upon as the two are strongly connected to each other. Next, I will dedicate their own subchapters to discussing language testing and test usefulness, as well as listening and listening comprehension. Finally, I will take a look at previous research that has been conducted with similar interests to mine. In chapter 3 I will explain in more detail what kind of material was used in my research and how the research was carried out.

After the chapters on theoretical background and material and methods, I will move on to presenting the results and findings made in the study, which was realised by examining eight different advanced syllabus level Matriculation Examinations of English as a foreign language that were held between 2016 and 2022. The study is limited to this quite short time period to allow special focus to specifically the changes that have been made to the examinations surrounding its digitalisation.

The first object of the study is to make comparisons between examinations from before and after the digitalisation. The second object is to compare the examinations held post-digitalisation with each other to see what kinds of generalisations can be made from them. Much of the focus will be given to how multimodal material has been utilised in the listening comprehension examinations. The results presented in chapter 4 will be discussed more in their own chapter, chapter 5, and finally the thesis will end with a separate conclusion chapter.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this section I will present and discuss some previous literature and studies that are relevant to the purposes of the thesis. First, I will present some background on language testing in general, also briefly looking into some theory on test usefulness. Next, I will briefly introduce Finnish general upper secondary education and Matriculation Examinations. Afterwards, I will move on to discussing theoretical background on listening and listening comprehension, as well as multimodality and how it relates to listening. In addition, I will also briefly discuss some theory on accents, pragmatics and politeness, and reading images. Finally, I will present and discuss some previously conducted research that relates to the subject of this thesis.

2.1 General upper secondary education in Finland

In this chapter, I will take a brief overall look at general upper secondary education in Finland, especially focusing on the subject of English as a foreign language in the national core curriculum for general upper secondary education. Later, in the subchapters I will first discuss the Common European Framework of Reference in Languages (CEFR) from the point of view of general upper secondary education, after which I will discuss the Finnish Matriculation Examinations in general and then also the Finnish Matriculation Examination of English, the listening comprehension section of which will be the focus of my study.

Since the amendment to the act on compulsory education came into effect in 2021, each child between the ages 7 and 18 are obligated to attend compulsory education (Oppivelvollisuuslaki). First, each child must finish their basic education, after which they can choose to continue either to general upper secondary education, vocational education and training, or a special preparatory training. Most often basic education is completed at the age

of 16. General upper secondary education begins when a student has finished their basic education syllabus and received their certificate. On the website of the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, the objectives of general upper secondary education are summarised as follows:

Under the Act on General Upper Secondary Education, the objective of general upper secondary education is to help students grow into decent, well-rounded and educated human beings and members of society, and to provide them with the knowledge and skills required for engaging in further studies, working life and hobbies as well as to further their versatile personal development.

A similar view is also brought up in the national core curriculum for general upper secondary education, which states that:

The purpose of general upper secondary education is to strengthen the comprehensive general knowledge. In general upper secondary education, general knowledge consists of values, knowledge, skills, attitudes and will, with the help of which individuals capable of critical and independent thinking have the ability to act responsibly, compassionately, collectively, and educate themselves.¹

Based on these definitions, it can be summarised that the most important goals of the general upper secondary education in Finland are to provide its students with wide-ranging general knowledge and abilities to act in a society, and to prepare them for future studies in higher education. The national core curriculum also offers frames for the studies of English as a foreign language. It lists the modules from which the studies consist of and briefly summarises their main objectives. The concept of listening comprehension is not explicitly mentioned in any of the goals or central contents defined for the compulsory study modules.

It should be taken into account that a new national core curriculum was implemented during the time period examined in this thesis, which may also have some effect on the found results. The two national core curricula in effect during the observed period were the National Core Curriculum of 2015 (Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2015), which was

¹ my translation

implemented on students that started their upper secondary school education on August 1st of 2016 or later, and the National Core Curriculum of 2019 (Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2019), which was implemented on students starting on August 1st of 2021 or later. While these two national core curricula share some of their contents, there are also differences that should be noticed. Perhaps the most notable difference is the depth of detail into which the curricula go. The 2019 national core curriculum offers in considerably greater detail the targeted learning objectives of each individual English study module, while the 2015 national core curriculum only offers them for the subject of English as a foreign language in general. In the 2019 curriculum, also the central contents have been explicitly written down for each individual study module. Another thing that has been added to the more recent national core curriculum is the mention of English as a lingua franca, a term which was not explicitly used in the earlier one.

2.1.1 Matriculation Examinations in Finland

To receive their Matriculation Examination certificate and graduate from upper secondary school, the student must pass Matriculation Examinations in a number of different subjects. These are so-called high-stakes examinations, as their results can determine for example which further education programme the students might be accepted in. Those students who started their studies before the spring of 2022 must pass a minimum of four examinations, which include mother tongue and literature, and at least three other subjects, one from any of the following groups: second national language, foreign language, mathematics, and humanities and sciences. One of these must be completed on advanced syllabus level (Ylioppilastutkintolautakunta 2021). For students who started their studies in the spring of 2022 or later, the requirements changed, and they must now pass a minimum of five matriculation examinations to receive their certificate, including mother tongue and literature, and at least

four subjects from at least three of the following groups: second national language, foreign language, mathematics, and humanities and sciences. In their case as well, one of the examinations must be of advanced syllabus level (*ibid.*).

The questions that are included in the Matriculation Examinations are based on the contents of the general upper secondary education syllabus, which is in turn based on the national core curriculum. To be able to take part in the Matriculation Examination, the student must first complete all mandatory study units in the subject, and is also recommended to complete optional study units that are offered on national level. Naturally, with the changes implemented to the national core curriculum, also the questions included in the matriculation examinations go through changes.

Matriculation Examinations in general have gone through various changes throughout the years, and without a doubt one of the biggest changes of the past decade has been their digitalisation. The first digitalised examinations were held in the autumn term of 2016, after which all Matriculation Examinations were digitalised in six stages. The first digitalised Matriculation Examination of English was held in the spring of 2018.

2.1.2 Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is a framework commonly used in Europe to assess the level of language skills of an individual. It was produced by the Council of Europe in the early 2000s. In the CEFR (2020), its function is defined in the following way:

One of the main principles of the CEFR is the promotion of the positive formulation of educational aims and outcomes at all levels. Its “can do” definition of aspects of proficiency provides a clear, shared roadmap for learning, and a far more nuanced instrument to gauge progress than an exclusive focus on scores in tests and examinations. This principle is based on the CEFR view of language as a vehicle for opportunity and success in social, educational and professional domains.

The CEFR describes six different levels of language ability, ranging from A1 to C2, with A1 being the lowest level, and divides language learners to three different groups based on their skills: learners on levels A1 and A2 are classified as Basic Users, learners on levels B1 and B2 are considered Independent Users and learners on levels C1 and C2 are Proficient Users (ibid., 36).

The CEFR also serves as one of the bases for the aims of language teaching mentioned in the national core curriculum for general upper secondary education. In it one can find the target levels of language skills for students of English as a foreign language, for both basic and advanced syllabus levels. They are divided into three different subcategories: the communicative ability, the ability to interpret texts, and the ability to produce texts. Unlike in the previous national core curriculum, listening comprehension does not have its own category, but instead it can be considered to belong in the second one of these subcategories. For students studying on advanced syllabus level, the target level for this skill that is mentioned in the national core curriculum is B2.1, and for the students studying on basic syllabus level the corresponding target level is either B1.1 or B1.2 depending on when they began their English studies.

2.1.3 Matriculation Examination of English as a foreign language

There are two different syllabus levels on which the Matriculation Examinations of English can be taken. These are the advanced syllabus level and the basic syllabus level, both of which include a listening comprehension section. In this thesis, the focus will be mainly directed towards the listening comprehension sections of the advanced syllabus level examinations. As stated in the previous section, the first digitalised Matriculation Examination of English was held in the spring of 2018, simultaneously for both syllabus levels. The digitalisation opened

up new possibilities for listening comprehension materials and questions, which will be one of the factors studied in this thesis. It changed the examinations of English, as well as other foreign and second national languages, quite notably. Whereas before digitalisation the language examinations were divided into two distinct parts that were taken on two different dates and settings, including a separate listening comprehension part and a written part, now the whole examination is taken in one sitting. Perhaps the most obvious change has been made to the format of the examination: while before the digitalisation the examination was completed fully on paper, today the format is strictly electronic, and the examination is taken on computers. The surroundings of the examination have also changed at least to some extent, since currently the students are expected to listen to the test's listening comprehension material using their personal headphones and at their own pace, whereas before digitalisation each of the test takers needed to listen to the recordings at the same time. Ylioppilastutkintolautakunta (2021) also points out that the digitalisation of the language tests has allowed the use a wider selection of listening comprehension materials to be used in them, allowing the test items to be designed to be more diverse and authentic. This claim is also looked into in more detail later on in this thesis.

2.2 Language testing and test usefulness

To make the assessment of language tests possible, it is crucial to consider what makes a test good and why. One widely recognised theory for creating and assessing language tests is Bachman and Palmer's test usefulness theory. According to Bachman & Palmer (1996, 17-18), when designing and creating a language test, it is most important to consider the use for which it is created, thus making a test's most important quality its usefulness. To assess exactly this, they have developed the model of test usefulness, in which they have divided overall test

usefulness to six distinct qualities. These qualities include reliability, construct validity, authenticity, interactiveness, impact and practicality.

Bachman and Palmer (ibid.) explain that traditionally the different qualities of a test have been viewed to be more independent, where the maximisation of one quality may lead to losing another, a view to which they attempt to make a change. Instead, in composing a test, they recognise the need to implement an appropriate balance between these six qualities, which may vary according to the situation. They illustrate this by giving an example contrasting two different types of tests: meanwhile a test designed to allow decision-making about an extensive number of individuals would likely be designed to be high in reliability and validity, a test conducted in a classroom situation might contrastively be designed to prioritize the test's authenticity, interactiveness and impact (ibid., 19). In fact, the Finnish Matriculation Examinations serve as a great example of the previous kind of test, so perhaps one might expect them to indeed be high in both reliability and validity.

Reliability is often defined as consistency in measurement, which means that in order to be reliable, the results of a test must remain consistent regardless of the testing situation or test task characteristics (ibid.). In practice, for instance, this would mean that an individual test taker's results should remain the same if they took the test in two different settings. The same should also be true if an individual test taker took two distinct tests that were designed to be used interchangeably (ibid., 20). This is without a doubt an important quality for any test, but it is especially a crucial quality for the Matriculation Examinations to have, as they are held simultaneously in hundreds of different upper secondary schools throughout the country, and thus also in hundreds of distinct settings.

By construct validity Bachman and Palmer (ibid., 21-22) refer to "the meaningfulness and appropriateness of the *interpretations* we make on the basis of test scores" and explain that in order to make any interpretations based on test scores, one has to offer sufficient

justifications for doing so. This should be done by providing evidence that the test score indicates exactly that language construct/constructs or ability/abilities that are being measured. An example is given from a context of placing students on different levels on an academic writing course: while a multiple-choice test on grammatical knowledge might be high in reliability, it would not be valid for the situation because grammatical knowledge is only one of many abilities an individual might need to obtain to succeed in academic writing (ibid., 23).

The listening comprehension section of the Matriculation Examination normally consists of questions covering various different types of language abilities. The answer formats in these questions, however, are less variable. Most of the questions are answered by choosing the correct alternative from a list of alternatives. From here on, these types of questions will be referred to as multiple choice questions. The other type of questions that is usually found in the Matriculation Examinations is one where the student must answer the question briefly in their own words. This type will be referred to as open-answer questions. As stated earlier, the previous type is much more frequently used in the questions in the listening comprehension of the Matriculation Examination of English. This is, of course, to be expected, as it is such a large-scale examination, and checking an immense number of open answers would be extremely time and labour consuming, whereas the multiple-choice questions can be checked automatically and thus much more effortlessly.

Hughes (1992, 59) explains that multiple-choice test items can appear in many forms, but their basic structure usually includes a stem, which is the question, and various answer options including the correct answer(s), as well as distractors. The test taker must then identify the correct or appropriate option from the distractors. He adds that one of the clearest advantages of the multiple-choice format in tests is that their scoring is likely to be reliable, and at the same time their scoring is usually fast and economical.

There are, however, different problems that may arise with the employment of this answer format (ibid., 60-62). First, Hughes (ibid.) mentions that instead of testing the test taker's ability to produce language, the multiple-choice format items merely test their receptive skills and recognition knowledge. This may potentially pose an issue for accurately testing their skills, as some candidates' productive and receptive skills might not be at the same level. Secondly, there is a possibility that a test taker may perform well in the test by simply guessing between the alternatives. Furthermore, it is impossible to accurately tell which of the questions were in fact answered by guessing, as the success rate of it might vary between individuals.

The next problem that Hughes (ibid.) recognises is the restrictions that the adoption of the multiple-choice format sets for what can be tested. This is due to the question's answer options always needing distractors, which may simply not be available for the questions concerning specific topics, for instance some grammar structures. Furthermore, even when there are possible distractors, good ones may be difficult to compile, and require much more preliminary options that then need to be pretested and discarded before being used in the final form of the test (ibid.). The fourth problem is that the backwash from multiple-choice format tests might result harmful. By backwash Hughes (1992, 1) refers to a situation where testing affects teaching and learning, which can be either harmful or beneficial. In this case, Hughes (ibid., 62) points out that practising for these types of tests might not be the best way for students to improve their language skills, but rather teach them to make educated guesses. Finally, one of the problems that might be related with the multiple-choice format is that it could make cheating easier. This is due to the easiness for the test takers to communicate the answers (for instance a, b, c, or d) to other candidates.

The employment of the multiple-choice format in language comprehension tests has been a much-debated issue, and faced even quite strong criticism, as mentioned by Freedle and Kostin (1999, 3). Perhaps the most severe point of criticism is the claim that in order to be able

to answer the multiple-choice questions, the test takers do not necessarily need to comprehend the text that they are based on. They go on to remind that this kind of view is likely to be overly extreme, and that they can be proven wrong “by showing that some variables that reflect the structure and content of the text passage are significantly correlated with item difficulty” and that finding these kinds of correlations would subsequently indicate that the test takers are in fact presumably utilising the information provided by the text to choose the correct alternatives to the questions (ibid.).

2.3 Listening and L2 listening comprehension

Listening is one of the central skills required to achieve proficiency in any language. Its importance is also highlighted in the context of the Matriculation Examinations of English, as well as other foreign languages, as they all contain a section dedicated solely to it. Listening, as Brown (2016, 201) explains, is at the same time both a skill to be acquired, as well as a significant means of input for language acquisition that almost simultaneously requires the listener to employ both top-down and bottom-up processes. He continues to explain that in order to understand language, the listener has to carry out multiple processes, including segmenting the sounds in the input, connecting them to words, and giving meaning to what was listened to by utilising long-term memory and contextual information. This complexity of listening comprehension, as Goh (2016, 214) emphasises, is especially true for L2 speakers of English, to whom listening often poses one of the most demanding factors in language development, whereas L1 listening is, in contrast, usually viewed as a considerably less demanding process.

According to Field (2004), many researchers believe that in the case of lower-level L2 learners there is a tendency of relying too heavily on bottom-up information, which uses up a considerable amount of time and mental resources, which in turn decreases their capability to

achieve understanding of higher-level units of meaning. There is, however, some contradicting evidence on the matter. He recognises that some of this contradiction may have to do with a lot of the research on language learners' tendencies to use top-down vs bottom-up processes in decoding texts comes from reading comprehension rather than listening comprehension (ibid.). Additionally, he claims that with the increase in the use of authentic materials in listening comprehension input, the language learners' have needed to change their views: previously, as scripted texts were designed to reflect the level of the learner, the learner may have felt the need to understand every word of the text. The increase in the use of authentic texts, however, has led to the belief that rather than understanding every single word, it is rather more important to understand the 'bigger picture', which would require the learner to use more top-down processes. (ibid.)

Apart from the earlier mentioned skills, there is one more that is crucial in allow the process of listening comprehension to happen in the first place: vocabulary knowledge. As Zhang & Zhang (2022) point out, its role is pivotal in both L2 reading as well as L2 listening comprehension. While it is in general quite well established that vocabulary knowledge and both L2 listening and L2 reading are interrelated, it is not as well understood how these skills correlate with the strength of different dimensions of vocabulary knowledge, which include receptive/orthographic vocabulary knowledge, productive/orthographic vocabulary knowledge and productive/phonological vocabulary knowledge (Cheng & Matthews 2018). In their study they found out that out of these dimensions, it was the productive/phonological vocabulary knowledge that correlated the most with successful L2 listening.

According to Brown (2016, 201), the problems in listening comprehension that language learners most often appear to struggle with most commonly are the speed and style of speech, the latter including factors such as accent. Problems also often arise with vocabulary and breaking up the stream of speech into individual understandable units. Some of these

difficulties are also reflected in the findings of Goh (2000), who recognised 10 problems in listening comprehension that could be categorised in three broad categories: first, problems related to word recognition such as recognising known words or breaking the stream of speech into words; secondly, problems related to attention like missing the beginning of a text or having trouble concentrating; and thirdly, problems related to not being able to form a coherent overview of the text, i.e. “seeing the trees, but not the forest”. In their study, Chang et al. (2013) found that situational factors such as surrounding noise and distortion of input, as well as uninteresting topics or anxiety were also seen as a cause of problems in listening comprehension.

Apart from carrying out various cognitive processes, Goh (2016, 215) points out that it is generally recognised among the research field that L2 listening comprehension also requires a set of sub-skills from the listener. There is no full conformity on which specific sub-skills these include, but instead different scholars have suggested different taxonomies and lists that vary in length and level of detail. One of these was compiled by Vandergrift and Goh (2012) and includes six core skills that the listener might need to employ to varying degrees depending on the situation: listening for details, listening to infer, listening for global understanding, listening for main ideas, listening to predict and listening selectively. It should be taken into account that these divisions are still currently sometimes questioned due to scarcity of research on the divisibility in the field of psychology (*ibid.*).

When listening comprehension tests are designed, it should also be considered what type of language input is used. Wagner and Ockey (2018, 13) recognise three potential sources for the input that test makers can potentially utilise in designing tests: first, they can develop spoken texts by writing scripts that are then read out loud by actors and recorded; second option is to utilise authentic, or unscripted, texts that have been found from electronic databases like the internet or recorded from real language use situations; or thirdly, they have the option to

create semi-scripted texts by creating outlines of different types of speaking scenarios that are then carried out by actors.

As Wagner et al. (2021, 205-206) point out, in ideal situations the input utilised in listening comprehension tests would be texts that are in the range of the target language use (or TLU) domain of interest, and that at the same time share characteristics with real language use, meaning that they are examples of authentic, non-scripted speech. They then go on to remind that in most cases of high-stakes language tests this kind of approach is not adopted for various reasons, but instead they use almost exclusively scripted spoken texts. These reasons may include scripted texts being easier and less expensive to find or produce, better fulfilling the requirements and overall being more practical to use (ibid.).

2.3.1 Multimodality

With the digitalisation of the Finnish Matriculation Examinations, multimodality has become a more central concept than ever before also in the listening comprehension section of the Matriculation Examination of English. This is because the digitalisation allows a far wider range of different types of material to be utilised in the listening comprehension questions. Whereas before digitalisation the material comprised only of different types of audio material, the examinations now also include multimodal material such as videos and images, and therefore multimodality has become a key concept in studying the Matriculation Examinations of English.

Ockey and Wagner (2018, 129-130) point out that even though traditionally L2 listening tests have only used audio texts as their material, listening comprehension often also includes a visual factor, for instance seeing the speaker and their nonverbal communication. They note that there are many contradicting opinions on whether visual material should be included at all in listening comprehension tests among the researchers in the field of study of listening

comprehension. Some of the researchers are of the opinion that listening comprehension tests should contain strictly audio-only material, because according to them listening is strictly an aural phenomenon. In this category Ockey and Wagner (ibid.) list researchers such as Buck, who states that users of tests “are usually interested in the test takers’ language ability, rather than the ability to understand subtle visual information” and Choi et al. who believe that visual influence might distort the results of a listening test. Some researchers also believe that visual input in listening tests may act as a distraction from the aural input, even though it is exactly the aural input that should be central (ibid.). In his study Coniam (2001) gathered results that support the idea that listening comprehension tests should be completed in audio rather than audio-visual mode, as the observed group felt that watching a video while taking a listening comprehension test was distracting them.

On the other hand, other researchers have adopted an almost opposite view and believe that the notion of listening comprehension should be understood in a wider sense than what has been traditionally adopted, and that therefore it should in fact include the ability of the listener to process the visual information communicated by the speaker, as well as the contextual information transmitted from the setting of the situation (ibid.). Ockey and Wagner (ibid.) provide multiple examples from the works of different researchers: according to von Raffler Engel, excluding the visual factor from L2 listening tests makes them in fact “unnatural”, because a communication situation without a visual channel is not really communication in its full sense; similarly, according to Gruba, visual input should be included in L2 listening tests as it more authentically represents spoken communication by including both visual and verbal elements; finally, Field is of the opinion that “visual information is not additional or supplementary to auditory; it forms an intrinsic part of a listening event”.

Von Zansen (2019, 21) brings up an interesting suggestion discussed previously by researchers such as Schroeders (2010) and Batty (2015), among others, that perhaps instead of

still always talking simply of listening comprehension, one might also adopt terms such as visual listening comprehension, audio-visual comprehension, viewing/watching comprehension, video comprehension or multimedia comprehension. This is an interesting view that has become more important also in the context of the Matriculation Examinations in the recent years.

Even though listening has been defined as “the action of processing information which listeners get from visual and auditory clues in order to define what is going on and what the speakers are trying to express” (Rubin 1995, 151), traditionally the focus in the study of listening and listening strategies has heavily centred in only auditory input, and mostly disregarded its visual and non-verbal aspects. This tendency is, however, starting to change due to advances in technology and growing interest in using audio-visual materials in language teaching and learning (ibid.).

Norte Fernández-Pacheco (2016, 50) explains that the recent growing interest in multimodality has been a result of the rapid arrival, spread and invention of new types of technologies that have become an intrinsic part of our lives, and generated novel ways of representing and communicating meaning. She also brings up the concept of digital natives, using it to refer to the younger generations whose familiarity with different technologies like smartphones, laptops, video games and other electronic devices, also called digital literacy, is compared with first language acquisition. Digital immigrants, contrastively, are those generations before who have had to adapt to the new technologies and have had to learn to use them in a different way (ibid.). This generational change is also naturally reflected in the needs and requirements for the listening comprehension tests in the Matriculation Examination of English, because a clear majority of the examinees today belong to the generation of digital natives, whereas only quite a short time ago the situation was completely different.

It should also be noted that multimodal material does not necessarily need to be included in the form of videos, because images included in listening comprehension examinations can also be considered to be multimodal elements. In her study Ginther (2002) observed how the use of different, either context or content-based visual cues affected the performance of test takers in computer-based TOEFL tests. The context-based visual clues could include for example images of the interaction or a conversation taking place, whereas content-based clues could picture for example some object that is being talked about. The study found that when audio input was complemented by visuals that align with them, the test takers' performance on the test improved slightly (*ibid.*). This suggests that the inclusion of visual aspects in listening comprehension tests is useful. A somewhat similar finding was made in the study conducted by Karimi and Biria (2014), who found that in addition to improving the individuals' performance in listening comprehension, using different kinds of visuals also enhanced the individuals' motivation for the task.

2.3.2 Accents

The listening comprehension material for the listening comprehension sections of the Matriculation Examinations of English usually includes a variety of speakers from distinct linguistic backgrounds, which means that the examinations usually include multiple different types of accents from different parts of the English-speaking world. This calls for the students to be able to understand multiple different ways of speaking. Because the listening comprehension material for the listening comprehension exercises is varied, a question arises of how this inclusion of different accents may affect the listening of the students.

Ockey and Wagner (2018, 67) explain that the traditional view has been that the ideal speakers to assess listening are ones who speak in a variety used in target language use situation, and therefore, for example speakers of general American variety should be used to

assess the listening of someone who aims to become a user of American English. They then, however, continue to explain that recently this view has been challenged because of various factors, including factors such as globalisation and the use of English as lingua franca. The concept of English as a lingua franca is important also in Finland, because a large number of people who use English in their everyday life, be it in work, education, or free time contexts, are L2 speakers of English. Like MacKenzie (2014, 1-2) summarises, the main idea behind the use of English as a lingua franca is that when non-native English speakers use English to communicate with each other, the language should not have to be strictly related to a specific target culture and expect specific ways of speaking and behaving. Instead, rather than imitating native English speakers as closely as possible, the main goal of language use should be to communicate as efficiently as possible and achieve mutual intelligibility.

The changes in these views may alter the grounds for selecting speakers and varieties to be utilised in the exercises, since speech communities that use only one variety of English are becoming continuously rarer (Ockey and Wagner 2018, 67-68.). Taking these factors into consideration, they (*ibid.*) note that currently it is suggested that L2 speakers of English might actually outnumber L1 speakers. If this is the case, it would speak for the necessity for all English speakers to be able to understand the speech of those that speak English as a second language, and therefore for the need to include those varieties also in listening comprehension exercises.

Sometimes it might be thought that the inclusion of speakers of different accents in listening comprehension tests is questionable because it purposefully makes the material harder to understand. This, however, is not always the case. Ockey and Wagner (*ibid.*, 68-69) explain, that numerous researchers have done work to confirm the idea that someone speaking in a different accent does not necessarily make their speech incomprehensible, and instead emphasise the distinction between the concepts of sounding different, being incomprehensible

and being unintelligible. To make these distinctions, the definitions of the words must be considered: to define accent, one should consider “the ways and degree to which a speaker’s speech sounds different than the speech of speakers of the local variety”, the local variety being the point of comparison; the level of comprehensibility, on the other hand, is defined by a listener’s opinion on how difficult it is to understand the speaker; finally, the level of intelligibility is measured by finding out to which extent the speaker’s intended message is understood by listeners who are users of the same language variety (ibid.).

The findings of Abeywickrama (2013) seem to confirm that the variety of English used in a listening comprehension test does not necessarily have an effect on how the examinees perform in it. In her study she studied how intelligible the speech of people from different linguistic backgrounds was, when the speakers were not native English speakers. The results showed that test takers did not perform in the test any differently when the input was produced by non-native speakers (NNSs). However, when the test takers were asked about their individual preferences, the majority of them still portrayed perceptions and attitudes that showed a preference for the inclusion of standard English accents in listening comprehension tests.

2.4 Previous research

Previous research that focuses on the topics of this thesis has been conducted, but few of the studies share exactly the same interests. Hildén et al. (2021) published a research article on the multimodal listening comprehension exercises in the advanced syllabus Matriculation Examinations of languages, in which they studied the fairness and the appropriateness of the listening comprehension exercises, focusing on the multimodal exercise types in the examinations of English, Swedish and German. They state that while before the digitalisation the need to apply pragmatic and sociolinguistic knowledge and skills was not very great, the

questions with multimodal material that has been since added to the listening comprehension parts of the matriculation examinations requires them much more often. This is because figuring out the correct answer to these questions might often require the examinee to simultaneously interpret multiple information sources, such as images, speech, and body language. This process can potentially impose a significant cognitive strain on the examinee. (ibid.) For example, the examinee might find it hard to simultaneously both observe the speaker's body language and read a text appearing on the screen while also decoding what is being said out loud. It is also possible that while struggling to process the message, the examinee misses what is being communicated next.

Von Zansen (2019) also studied a similar topic in her dissertation, in which she investigated how visual material such as pictures and video affect listening comprehension. Additionally, in her dissertation she also studied the beliefs of Finnish upper secondary school students on listening comprehension and the digitalisation of the Matriculation Examinations. Her experimental study was realised by randomly dividing the study subjects into three groups, which were all given a different amount of visual aid in listening comprehension exercises in a classroom setting. One group received visual aid in the form of videos, one in the form of still pictures, and one was not given any visual aid at all. The study examined both the subjects' performance in the listening comprehension exercises, as well as their personal views and attitudes towards them. The results of Von Zansen's (2019) study revealed that there were no clear differences in the performance of the study subjects in terms of the visual aid that they received during the task.

Most of the studies focusing both on the multimodality of listening comprehension exercises and on the listening comprehension section of the Matriculation Examination of English as a foreign language, specifically set in the Finnish context, have been carried out either before the digitalisation or very shortly after it. For this reason, further and updated

research on the matter is called for. It would also be worthwhile to conduct more studies comparing the listening comprehension sections of the matriculation examinations with those of different high-stakes language tests, and see what kinds of similarities and differences they have.

3 MATERIAL AND METHODS

This chapter of the thesis explains what kinds of material are included in the analysis and the methods used in it. The first subchapter explains what material was used in the examination. It describes what the material consists of, how large the variety of material is, and where it was all retrieved from. The second subchapter then explains the methodology used in this thesis, describing in more detail how the material was analysed.

3.1 Material

The material used in this thesis comes from the listening comprehension sections of old advanced syllabus level matriculation examinations of English as a foreign language. These old matriculation examinations have been retrieved from YLE Abitreenit website, which is run by the Finnish Broadcasting Company (YLE). On this website one can find complete old matriculation examinations, including the answer key describing the characteristics of a good answer. For this thesis I analysed only the Finnish language versions of the matriculation examinations, although they are held in both of Finland's two national languages, Finnish and Swedish. The questions included in the two versions are the same, only in different languages.

For my analysis, I have chosen to include matriculation examinations from both before and after their digitalisation to allow making comparisons both between the different modes of examinations as well as individual examinations. More emphasis will be given for the examinations realised after the digitalisation, as multimodality is one of the main points of interest of this thesis. Despite this, examinations from before the digitalisation have also been included in the analysis to facilitate making comparisons also between traditional and digitalised examinations.

The examinations that I have decided to include in my analysis come from the following examination periods: spring 2016 (S2016), autumn 2017 (A2017), spring 2018 (S2018, first digital examination), autumn 2018 (A2018), autumn 2019 (A2019), spring 2020 (S2020), spring 2021 (S2021) and autumn 2022 (A2022). These examination periods were chosen in order to include at least one listening comprehension part from each of the last seven years, and the two examinations immediately following their digitalisation. The material that is included in the analysis comprises of all aspects of the chosen listening comprehension parts, including the questions, the answer options and instructions, as well as the listening comprehension material provided for the questions. The various types of questions will be divided into different categories, and the answering instructions and answer options will be looked into. The listening comprehension material included in the examinations comes in the form of various different types of recordings, including both audio-only material and multimodal material.

3.2 Methods

In this study, both qualitative and quantitative methods are used in order to enable analysing the listening comprehension parts of the matriculation examinations of English as a foreign language. Quantitative methods are required in order to analyse the prevalence of different types of listening comprehension materials that have been included in the listening comprehension examinations, as well as in the analysis of the structures of the examinations. The different types of listening comprehension materials are divided into their respective groups, and the number of instances in each group is then looked at in more detail. The structure of the listening comprehension parts of the matriculation examinations will be analysed by counting the number of sections and the number of different question types they include. The

question types include multiple-choice questions, open answer questions, and fill in the blank questions.

The adoption of qualitative methods, on the other hand, is also necessary to allow closer examination of both the listening comprehension material for the questions, as well as individual questions and their answering instructions. The qualitative analysis carried out in the current thesis comes in many forms. Firstly, I will see what kinds of answering instructions are given to the test takers in different questions, and if they differ between different matriculation examinations. Secondly, I will observe the different groups of types of listening comprehension material established in the quantitative part of the analysis, and also direct focus in those groups that only appear in one instance. Thirdly, I will look at the multimodal aspects included in the matriculation examinations. The instances of multimodality containing video material will be examined separately from those instances where multimodal elements are included in the form of images.

4 RESULTS

In this chapter I will present the results of my analysis of the observed listening comprehension sections of the matriculation examinations of English as a foreign language. As stated in the previous section, all in all eight different listening comprehension parts from eight different examination periods will be analysed in this thesis. Out of these eight examinations, two come from the period before the digitalisation of the examinations, and six from after it.

This chapter begins by looking at the structure of different listening comprehension examinations and seeing how they have varied in the span of the observed period of time. The second subchapter will explain what types of listening comprehension material have been included in the questions by dividing the material into distinct groups, and analysing those groups in more detail. The third subchapter will look into the question words used in the questions, as well as the answering instructions provided for different questions, for example what examinees are expected to do and how the instructions are worded. After that, the chapter will finish with a section giving some attention to the accents that can be found in the listening comprehension materials, and how the employment of different accents has changed.

4.1 The structure of the listening comprehension sections

In this subchapter the structures of eight listening comprehension sections are examined both individually and in comparison with each other. All of the examined matriculation examinations are of advanced syllabus level. Table 1 below presents the basic structure of the eight examined advanced level listening comprehension sections of the matriculation examinations. Looking at sections taken from the examinations that were held before the digitalisation of the matriculation examinations from S2016 and A2017, an interesting

observation can be instantly made about their structure: they seem to be virtually identical. Both of them are divided into five distinct sections and exactly 31 questions, of which 26 are answered by choosing the correct alternative from three options, and the last five questions by giving short open answers using one's own words. When looking at the structure, it should be noted that before the digitalisation, the answers to the listening comprehension questions were given on optical answer sheets, which facilitated their easier checking and was also highly likely the reason for using the same structure between different examination times, because the same answer sheets could be used both in different examination periods and in the listening comprehension examinations of different languages.

	S2016	A2017	S2018	A2018	A2019	S2020	S2021	A2022
Number of sections	6	6	6	8	9	6	8	8
Multiple-choice questions	26	26	25	25	26	18	20	21
Open-answer questions	5	5	5	5	12	5	5	9
Fill in the blank questions	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Total number of questions	31	31	30	30	38	23	26	30

Table 1: Structure of listening comprehension sections

As the table above well illustrates, after the format of the examination changed from traditional paper examination to a digital one (from autumn 2018 forwards), the distribution of the questions also started to vary to some extent. The number of sections included has varied between six and nine in all of the examined listening comprehension parts. The overall number of questions included in the listening comprehension parts has remained somewhat stable even

after the digitalisation, in most cases varying from 26 to 31 questions in total. There are, however, two rather clear exceptions to this trend. These exceptions come from the examinations of spring 2020 and autumn 2019. In spring 2020, only 23 questions in total were included. While the number of open-answer questions remained at five, as in most other cases, there were only 18 multiple-choice questions instead of the usual 25 or 26. In the examination held in autumn 2019, in turn, the number of both distinct sections and individual questions was notably larger than in the other examinations under scrutiny.

Another interesting observation comes from the autumn 2022 examination: while the overall number of questions did not stand out from the rest, the number of open-answer questions included was considerably high. Whereas most of the other examined listening comprehension parts included exactly five of them, the autumn 2022 examination included as many as nine. When these open-answer questions are looked at more closely and compared with the open-answer questions of the listening comprehension sections of the matriculation examinations from other test periods, it can be noted that the answering instructions provided for them are not identical with each other. This could in part explain also the differences in the number of questions. While in the autumn 2022 examination a strict maximum of either 50 (questions 5.1-5.3) or 150 (questions 3.1-3.2 and 6.1-6.4) characters is set for the given answers, the questions in most of the earlier examinations instruct the examinees to either answer the questions briefly, or simply do not offer any instruction concerning the length of the answer. There are also some instances where the examinees are instructed to mention a certain number of factors in their answer. For example, in question 7.2 from the spring 2018 examination the examinees are explicitly instructed to give two reasons for an accident that occurred.

An even more striking example of the same kind of tendency can be found from the earlier mentioned listening comprehension examination of autumn 2019, which seems to

include the largest number of both questions and parts of all of the analysed examinations. It consists of as many as 38 questions, as opposed to others that included only 23-31, and nine parts, while others had 6-8. Interestingly, it is not the number of multiple-choice questions that stands out in comparison with the other examinations, as it stays consistent with 26 questions. Instead, it is the number of open-answer questions that is considerably larger than in the other listening comprehension parts. Again, while the majority of the other examinations include five open-answer questions, and one includes nine, the examination from the autumn of 2019 includes as many as 12. What is noteworthy is that as opposed to the instructions given in the open-answer questions of the autumn 2022 listening comprehension part of the examination, the instruction in the open-answer questions from autumn 2019 do not offer any instructions concerning the length of the answers, neither in form of a character limit or in form of a written description (i.e. instructing to answer the questions *briefly*).

Along with the change from answering questions by checking boxes and writing short answers on optical answer sheets to answering them on a digital platform, new possibilities opened for the designers of the listening comprehension tests. Apart from the earlier observed changes in the number of questions, the way the questions are presented also changed, perhaps even more drastically. One notable change concerns the organisation of the questions: in the paper examinations held in S2016 and A2017 all 26 multiple-choice questions were placed consecutively in the beginning of the examination, finally followed by the five open-answer questions. Contrastively, in the later digitalised examinations it has been possible to place open-answer questions between the multiple-choice questions. It should also be noted that currently the examinees have the possibility to answer these questions in a self-selected order, which would not have been possible before digitalisation.

The listening comprehension examination from spring 2021 also introduced a type of question that is not found in the earlier ones. This question requires the examinee to fill in the

missing words in a summary of a recording where critical literacy is discussed. This question could be categorised as an open-answer question, but it is worth differentiating from the rest as its form is notably different from most of the other open-answer questions. This is because typically open-answer questions expect longer, multiple-word answers, while this fill-in-the-blank type question expects only individual words as answers. It is in fact emphasised in the question's answering instructions that each blank should be answered by using "one word only".

4.2 Listening comprehension material

This subchapter presents the analysis of the different types of language input that have been utilised as listening comprehension material for the listening comprehension parts of matriculation examinations of English. First, I will offer a more general view on the matter, and divide the distinct types of listening comprehension materials into categories. These categories will then be looked at in more depth. After that, attention will be directed at the multimodal listening comprehension materials that have been adopted in listening comprehension sections, and examining how prevalent they are in contrast to audio-only listening comprehension materials.

The audio or audio-visual input that has been utilised as the listening comprehension material in the questions can come from a multitude of different sources and be of numerous different types. This has become especially true after the digitalisation, which enabled an even wider selection of listening comprehension materials to be used in them. Whereas previously the selection was restricted only to purely aural material, for example recorded conversations, the digitalisation also allowed incorporating a visual aspect, for example videos, to it. To see exactly what kind of variety of material has been utilised in the listening comprehension parts, they need to be looked at more closely.

Table 2 below illustrates all different types of listening comprehension material that has been used in the listening comprehension sections of the selected matriculation examinations. To make analysis possible, the parts in the listening comprehension examinations were divided into categories according to the type of listening comprehension material that they incorporated. It should be noted that in some instances the parts/questions included multiple shorter pieces of the same type of input, and in these cases, they were only counted as one instance. The categories assigned to the types of listening comprehension material are the following: radio programme, conversation, news, (a) speech, presentation, video blog (vlog), podcast, description, advertisement, documentary, announcement, pitch, talk show, interview and audiobook. In some parts of the listening comprehension examinations, these categories were directly mentioned in the instructions, and the rest have been assigned by me. Table 2 presents these categories in order according to their frequency of use. It should be noted that some of the listening comprehension material input could have been assigned to more than one category, but has instead been assigned only to the one for which it best qualifies. Additionally, it should also be noted that this table does not account for the mode of the material, i.e. whether it is in audio-only format or a video. As a result, two instances that are categorised as the same type of material may be of different formats.

Type of material	S2016	A2017	S2018	A2018	A2019	S2020	S2021	A2022	total
conversation	2	1	-	3	4	1	4	1	16
podcast	2	1	2	1	2	1	-	2	10
presentation	-	1	2	1	-	1	2	-	7
news	-	1	2	2	-	1	-	-	6
documentary	-	-	1	1	-	2	-	-	4
radio programme	1	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	4
a speech	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	2
talk show	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	2
vlog	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
description	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
advertisement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
announcement	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
pitch	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
interview	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
audiobook	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1

Table 2: Types of listening comprehension material used in listening comprehension parts

The table illustrates that while some types of language input have quite well sustained their popularity as a source of listening comprehension material for the listening comprehension parts of the matriculation examinations, some have in fact disappeared virtually entirely and been replaced by other types of input. It can also be observed that there are some types that have only been utilised in one instance. Naturally, though, this does not mean that they could not be used again in the future. The types of background that include only one instance of use in the examined listening comprehension parts are vlog, description, advertisement, announcement, pitch, interview and audiobook.

One clear example of material that used to be found often as listening comprehension material but has since lost their popularity are radio programmes. This development may naturally be considered to be connected to the change in the format of the listening

comprehension part: as new multimodal material has been incorporated in the examinations, the need to eliminate some other type of material has probably risen at the same time due to the restrictions posed by the number of questions in each examination. Simultaneously it seems that podcasts have been able to maintain their popularity quite systematically, and have in fact appeared as listening comprehension material in all but one of the examined listening comprehension parts. This is interesting, as podcasts and radio programmes are in fact quite similar with each other in the sense that they are broad and can include a variety of different types of language input.

Another quite broad category that has clearly maintained its popularity as listening comprehension material is conversation, which can include a wide variety of different subjects. The popularity of conversations as a form of language input unlikely to be a surprise for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, conversations are an integral part of our daily lives, and necessary in order for us to interact with other people. In addition, conversations can cover a virtually infinite variety of topics, which also undoubtedly boosts their popularity. The choice of categorising an instance of listening comprehension material as conversation can also be somewhat questionable in the sense that for example some instances of other categories, for example radio programmes or podcasts, could also be assigned into the conversation category. News is another common category of listening comprehension material. This does not pose great surprises either. Quite similarly with conversation, news is also a category that can include a wide variety of topics and is an integral part of most people's everyday life, meaning that it is a category that is familiar to most examinees.

Overall, in the examined listening comprehension parts there are seven categories that only include one instance of use. These include the categories of video blog (vlog), description, advertisement, announcement, pitch, interview and audiobook. Curiously, all of the instances of the adoption of these categories come from just the four most recent ones of the analysed

examinations, starting from the A2019 examination. The change in the format of the exam is highly likely the most important reason for this evolvement, as the current format is more flexible in the sense that the listening comprehension examinations can include a variable number of both sections and questions, not limited by the number of spaces in the physical answering sheet. It is also worth noting, however, that the first two digitalised examinations, that is both of the examinations held in 2018, seem to lack these new types of listening comprehension material. A possible explanation for this lies in the magnitude of the format change: by implementing multiple large-scale changes, such as changes in both the format and the types of listening comprehension material included might increase the risk of ‘failure’ such as including non-ideal questions in the examination.

The increase in the variety of different types of listening comprehension material in the more recent listening comprehension examinations might be perceived as evidence for the identified need for a new and widened variety. Two of these newer additions, vlog and advertisement, were included in the listening comprehension material in the form of video and will as such be more closely examined in the following subchapter that is dedicated to multimodal listening comprehension materials. Of the other categories with just one instance of use, perhaps the most intriguing ones are pitch and audiobook.

In chapter 2.3 in the background section, it was mentioned that input used in listening comprehension examinations often consists of scripted speech rather than authentic language, and especially the material used in high-stakes tests is almost exclusively scripted. When listening to the listening comprehension materials employed in the listening comprehension parts of matriculation examinations of English, this tendency can also be found. This is especially true in case of the examinations held before the digitalisation process. For example, in the listening comprehension material for the S2016 examination, the majority of the language input is produced by the same two speakers, either conversing with each other or

speaking alone. In fact, it seems that most, if not all, listening comprehension material included in the listening comprehension parts of matriculation examinations held pre-digitalisation, was scripted and recorded in a controlled studio environment.

Next, I will move on to examine more closely the emergence of multimodal materials as listening comprehension material for listening comprehension parts of the matriculation examinations. Multimodal material can also be found in connection to some questions or in some answering options, but this subsection is dedicated exclusively to the instances of multimodality in the listening comprehension material. Multimodality in questions and answering options will be discussed later on in the thesis in chapter 4.3.

Figure 1 below illustrates the distribution of the different instances of listening comprehension material, making a distinction between audio-only input and input that includes multimodal elements, which in these cases invariably means some type of video. As one can observe from the figure, the degree to which multimodal material has been utilised as listening comprehension material has varied between different examinations. As mentioned before, multimodal elements were included in the matriculation examinations of English as a foreign language for the first time after the change of format from paper examinations to digitalised ones. This is also illustrated in the table, as the first instance of multimodal material can be found from the listening comprehension part from the spring of 2018, which was the first digitalised matriculation examination period for foreign languages on advanced syllabus level.

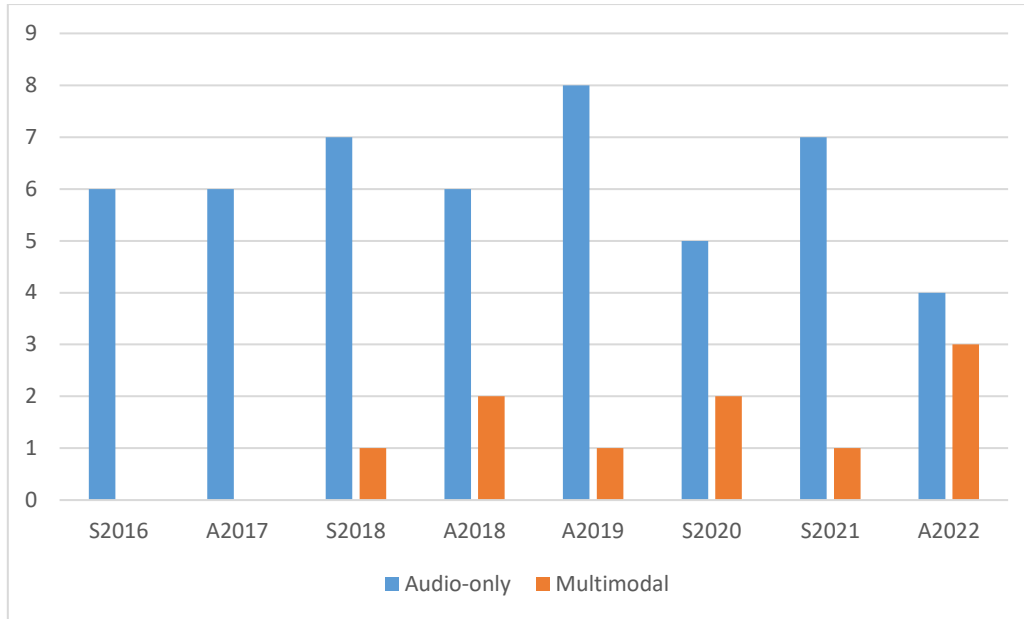


Figure 1: Distribution of audio-only versus multimodal listening comprehension material

From figure 1 it can be observed that while multimodal material has without a doubt established itself as a consistent part of the matriculation examinations' listening comprehension parts, audio-only material has still remained more popular. Most of the examined listening comprehension parts only included either one or two instances of questions with multimodal material as listening comprehension material, and over twice as many instances of audio-only material. A fascinating exception comes from the examination held in the autumn of 2022, where the listening comprehension materials consisted of as many as three instances of multimodal material, and only four instances of audio-only material, meaning that nearly half of all used listening comprehension material came in the form of videos. On the basis of just this one instance it is impossible to accurately tell whether this indicates a more permanent increase in multimodal listening comprehension material, but it is undoubtedly one possibility.

Even though all of these instances of multimodality in listening comprehension material come in the form of videos, they are by no means all uniform with each other. Firstly, to go back to the previous subsection, the video material can be divided to distinct categories. These categories include documentary, presentation, talk show, speech, advertisement and vlog. All

of these categories have their own set of conventions, so it is only natural that the videos following these conventions differ from each other. Furthermore, even when two videos belong to the same category, they are quite unlikely to be exactly identical with each other, for example in terms of what kinds of things are pictured in them and whether they contain some kinds of visual aids for listening comprehension, and to what extent. Next, I will analyse more closely some of the videos found in the listening comprehension parts of the matriculation examinations.

What all of the videos that have been used as listening comprehension listening comprehension material have in common is that they depict people speaking in them. Some of them, like the video titled ‘Art and Intellectualism’ from the examination of S2018 do not include many ‘visual aids’ apart from the speaker’s body language. Image 1 below is a screenshot taken from the video, which is 1:20 minutes long. The majority of the video clip depicts the two participants of the interview talking in turns. There is one exception, which takes place 0:48-0:55, where a piece of art that is discussed in the interview is depicted, alongside the name of the piece and its artist, as well as its year of publication.



Lähde: alesxh. Brian Eno – In Conversation, Artscape documentary, 2009. Youtube-videopalvelu, julkaistu 23.2.2013.
www.youtube.com. Muokkaus: YTL.

Image 1: screenshot from S2018 question 3 listening comprehension material

While some of the videos used as listening comprehension material are visually quite simple, like the previously examined example, others are quite the opposite. A great example of this kind of video comes from the examination of A2019. Image 2 below is a screenshot of a video titled ‘Breakfast television’ that lasts 3:53 minutes. Like its title well describes, it is a snippet of a morning talk show, where the show’s panellists are having a discussion with the city’s mayor. The visual look of the video seems to be quite typical of this type of show, with many different visual elements. These include things such as the title of the show, news headlines, weather forecast and current time. In addition, there are two instances in the video where something other than the speakers is pictured. These include an image of an app called Google Arts, and an image of a tweet. The video itself depicts five people discussing different topics.

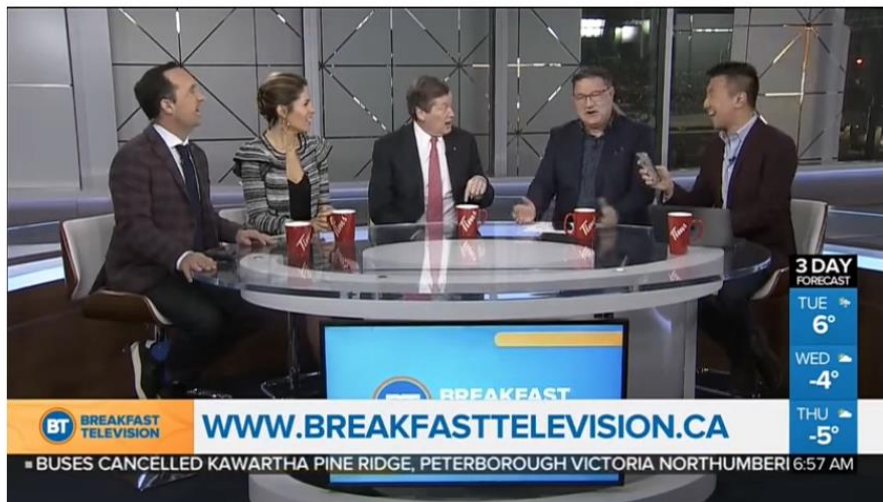


Image 2: screenshot from A2019 question 2 listening comprehension material

In addition to having a large number of visual elements, the speech in this piece of listening comprehension material is also perhaps more demanding to understand than in many others. This is because of the different qualities of speech mentioned in theoretical background section:

the speech is generally quite fast, and at times the speech of different speakers overlaps. This might make it harder for the listener to understand the speech, as they have to simultaneously carry out multiple cognitive processes.

Another type of video included as listening comprehension material comes from the examination of A2022, from a question titled 'Studying Multimedia Journalism', and the video can be categorised as an advertisement. It advertises a multimedia journalism study programme in Glasgow Caledonian University. The video has multiple different elements in it. It starts by displaying the logo of the university and the name of the study programme, which is followed by multiple snippets of a man doing different things associated with the studies and student life, such as being in a studio in front of cameras, editing videos and receiving instructions from a teacher. The audio in turn includes a male voice talking about the study programme with some background music. It is somewhat different from the previously discussed videos, as it does in fact not allow the examinees to observe the speaker's nonverbal communication, because the speaker himself is not pictured in the video.

An interesting question to consider is what would it change for the students taking the matriculation examinations if the listening comprehension materials used in these questions included only in audio-format instead of videos? There is no one simple answer for this question, as it would probably depend on the student and vary between different individuals. On one hand, some may find the presence of video helpful as it provides the chance to observe for example the expressions and body language of the speaker. On the other hand, others may find the videos distracting, and feel that the videos take their attention away from the questions they are expected to answer.

4.3 Answering instructions, questions, and different types of answer options

In this subchapter I will divert my focus from the question listening comprehension material to the questions themselves. The analysis will cover the formatting of the questions and the way in which the examinees are expected to answer, as well as any multimodal material relating to the questions, as opposed to the multimodality in listening comprehension material. I will also examine the wording of the answering instructions and the usage of different question words. Some attention will be given to unusual answer options in multiple-choice questions.

When comparing both the answering instructions to the questions and the questions themselves included in the listening comprehension sections of the matriculation examinations held before the digitalisation with those held after it, some interesting observations can be made of their format. The first observation concerns the instructions that are provided for the examinees before each section. In the examinations from before the digitalisation, these instructions are very brief and straightforward. For example, the instructions for S2016 examination's section I simply tell the test taker the following: "*You will hear part one twice: first straight through and then in short sections. Answer questions 1-4.*" In this case, the instructions do not explicitly mention what type of recording the examinee is about to hear. Nearly all of the answering instructions from the examinations held before digitalisation follow a similar pattern: they state how many times the recording can be listened to, and which questions the examinee is supposed to answer after hearing them. The instructions for section IV of the same S2016 examination do offer slightly more information on the type of the recordings, as the instructions state that the examinees will next hear four short dialogues, each one once only. The reason for the brevity of the instructions may be related to saving space and material, as longer instructions would lead to having to print longer examination sheets.

When looking at the answering instructions offered for questions in the digitalised examinations, it can instantly be observed that they include more detail concerning the type of

recording that is included in the listening comprehension material than the instructions given for the paper examinations. For example, the instructions for question 1 in the A2019 examination are the following: *“This is a podcast intended for tourists, discussing the Casa de Pico Motor Hotel in California. You can listen to this part twice: first straight through and then in short sections. Read the questions carefully and then listen to the recording.”* Apart from stating that the following recording will be a podcast, the instructions also reveal the test taker what the podcast will discuss and who is its intended audience. The instructions also use more space for telling the examinees how they should act: instead of just instructing the test takers to answer the questions, they also instruct to read the questions before listening to the recording. As a result of the change in the format of the matriculation examinations, some of their restrictions were simultaneously erased, one of them being the previously mentioned limitations set by physical space on the question booklets.

Another interesting observation can be made by looking at the questions themselves, specifically focusing on what question words are used in them. Table 3 below portrays how many times different question words appear in multiple-choice questions in the listening comprehension parts of different matriculation examinations. It should be noted that not all multiple-choice questions included question words in them, so the number of multiple-choice questions and instances of different question words may differ. These questions without question words include for instance those questions where the examinees are asked to choose the best alternative out of different options.

	S2016	A2017	S2018	A2018	A2019	S2020	S2021	A2022	In total
<i>what</i>	26	14	12	13	13	9	8	13	108
<i>why</i>	-	8	3	3	3	1	3	4	25
<i>how</i>	-	3	7	1	2	4	3	4	24
<i>who</i>	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	3
<i>which</i>	-	-	2	2	-	-	6	-	10
In total	26	26	25	19	18	14	20	22	

Table 3: question words used in multiple-choice questions

From the table it can be observed that *what* is used in the questions considerably often, as it appears more than four times as often as the second most used question word. In all of the examinations under scrutiny it was the most used question word. The S2016 examination is especially interesting from this point of view, as the multiple-choice questions included in it did not in fact include any other question words. The reasons for this are somewhat unclear, because the examination of A2017, the other observed listening comprehension section from before the digitalisation of the matriculation examinations, does not share this feature. This suggests that its popularity is not strictly related to the mode of the examination.

The two next most used question words are *why* and *how*, which are used 24-25 times in total. Their popularity seems to have remained mostly stable throughout the examined time period, with a couple of exceptions. *Why* was used as many as eight times in the 2017 examination, and only once in the S2020 examination. In all other examinations it was used in three or four questions. *How*, in turn, was used seven times in the S2018 examination, and only once in the A2018 examination. In other examinations it was used 2-4 times. *Who* and *which* were used the least often, *who* only three times and *which* ten times. Their scarcity may have to do with the restrictions that their usage sets for the usable answer options: the variety in the

potential answer options for a *what*-question is notably wider than that for a *who*-question. Still, it remains interesting that *what* is used so much more often than all of the other question words. Another interesting point is that there are also question words, such as *where* and *when*, that are not used at all in the listening comprehension questions.

The multiple-choice questions can be divided into a few different categories according to the way the examinees are expected to answer them. The first of these categories, and perhaps the most straightforward one, includes questions whose answer can be found directly from the listening comprehension material based on factors such as word choices. An example of this type of question in (1) can be found from question 6.1 in the S2018 examination. The listening comprehension material provided for this question is a podcast discussing airplane contrails.

- (1) How are cirrus clouds connected to contrails?
- a) Contrails actually are cirrus clouds
 - b) Contrails can develop into cirrus clouds
 - c) Contrails are condensed cirrus clouds

In order to answer the question, the examinee needs to find the required information from the listening comprehension material provided. The relevant part of the listening comprehension material for this question is transcribed here: “*Why do airplanes sometimes leave contrails behind? Actually contrails, short for condensation trails, are essentially clouds. They are no different from the cirrus clouds that naturally form in that region of the atmosphere.*” By listening to the recording, the examinees should be able to deduce that the correct answer to the question is option a.

The second category, where the answers can perhaps not quite as easily be deduced by focusing only on the word choices in the audio extracts, includes questions in which examinees are expected to “select the word that best describes the attitude or feeling expressed by the phrases in bold”, which makes them context-dependent. Example (2) of this type of question

comes from question 2.1 from the autumn 2018 matriculation examination. The question used in this example is presented to the examinees in two forms, both in writing and as a sound clip. The examinees are expected to deduce the answer from the delivery of the bolded part of the question.

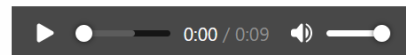
(2)

2.1. Mark: Don't forget about tomorrow night – it's Frank's twenty-first birthday party.
Dave: **Really?** Is he only twenty-one?

Is Dave

- surprised?
- skeptical?
- amused?

 The passage related to question 2.1.



The third category of questions include those questions in which the examinees are expected to determine the most polite response that can be given to continue the ongoing interaction. This means that in order to answer the question correctly, the students must have adequate knowledge of social etiquette in addition to possessing the necessary vocabulary. Example (3) of a question belonging in this category comes from question 9.1 in the examination from autumn 2019. Similarly to the previous example, the question is presented both in writing and as an audio clip.

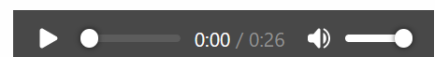
(3)

9.1. Waiter: So let me just read your order back to you. A pizza with mushrooms, onions, and green peppers – so that will be one of our vegetarian pizzas, with no tomatoes and no olives.

Customer:

- Excuse me, no sweetcorn as well?
- Wait – no sweetcorn also.
- Write down “no sweetcorn” too.

 The passage related to question 9.1.



In these ‘etiquette-based’ questions the examinees are expected to have knowledge of politeness as well as the necessary vocabulary. Apart from decoding the words used, the examinees may also have to listen for things such as voice tones.

A category quite similar to the previous one includes questions where the examinees are instructed to choose the alternative that best describes how the interaction would continue after the end of the recording. Example (4) comes from question 7.1 from the autumn 2022 examination. In this case it is also noteworthy that the multiple-choice answer options themselves are only presented in the form of short audio recordings, which have been transcribed in order to include them here. The text placed inside the brackets is not visually present for the examinees as they are completing the examination, and in the place of the bracketed utterances the answer form would instead have a “Play” button.

(4) What would the patient say?

Receptionist: [Hello, how can I help you?]

Patient:

- a) Option A. [I want to make an appointment to see a doctor. Is there anything available today or tomorrow?]
- b) Option B. [I need to see a doctor, and I’d like it as soon as possible. Is there a time slot available in the next two days?]
- c) Option C. [I’d like to arrange to consult with a doctor, please. Maybe today or tomorrow, if that’s possible.]

To be able to answer the question correctly, the examinee must again have knowledge on factors outside merely grammar and vocabulary. They must also have a sense of what is polite and what kinds of social norms they are expected to follow in these kinds of interactions. In this example, the examinees are not explicitly instructed to choose the most polite option, but it is still expected implicitly.

Next, I will move on to discuss multimodality outside the listening comprehension material in the listening comprehension sections. As mentioned in the earlier chapters, apart from being included as listening comprehension material, in some cases multimodal elements can also be found in other parts of the listening comprehension examinations, namely the questions. Usually in these other instances the multimodal element is included in the form of some type of image, and is linked to either the question in general and its instructions, or is it included as an answer option for a multiple-choice question. The former type of image can picture for example some type of object linked to the listening comprehension material, or the person speaking in the recording. The latter type, in turn, expects the examinee to choose the correct alternative from three images that best fits the instructions given. Figure 2 below illustrates how images have been incorporated into the listening comprehension parts in practice. As the examinations did not include multimodal elements before digitalisation, only the examinations from spring 2018 forward are included both in the figure and the discussion.

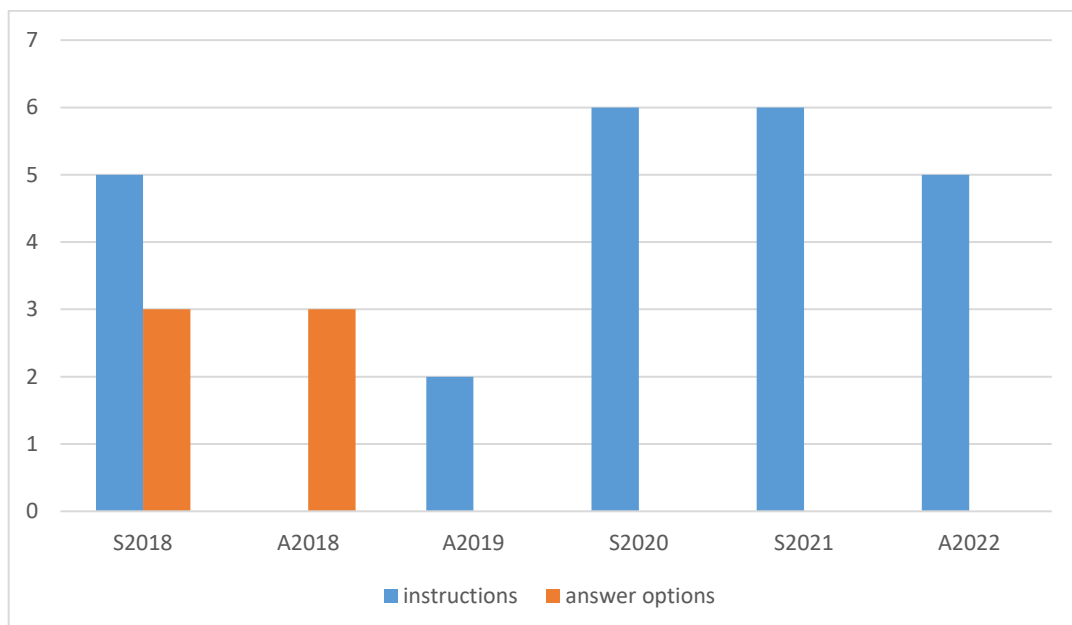


Figure 2: Multimodal elements outside listening comprehension materials

From this figure it can be observed that as well as in the listening comprehension material, multimodal elements have also quite clearly established themselves as a part of the questions themselves, as they are found in all of the examined listening comprehension examinations. Most often they can be found in relation to the answering instructions for a specific question. In four out of six of the analysed examinations, as many as 5-6 questions included some type of image connected to them. The examination from autumn 2019 makes an exception to this trend, as it contains only two images in relation to the questions. An even more drastic deviation, however, comes in the listening comprehension examination of autumn 2018, which did not include any of these types of images at all. This is especially interesting, as the examination immediately before it included as many as five.

The question arises: what kinds of purposes do these pictures serve and do they offer the examinees visual aid in answering the listening comprehension questions correctly? The variety of different images used is quite wide: they contain things such as logos, people, animals, items and scenery. Some examples of these are provided below in images 3, 4 and 5. At first glance it might seem that the images chosen are quite general and do not necessarily offer much direct aid in finding the correct answers for the questions, albeit being connected to the topic of both the listening comprehension material and questions. It is, however, important to analyse their function more closely. These images are most likely included alongside the listening comprehension questions as content-based visual clues, the purpose of which are to steer the examinees' focus towards the topics of the questions. Different images may also have their own distinct purposes, which will be discussed next.

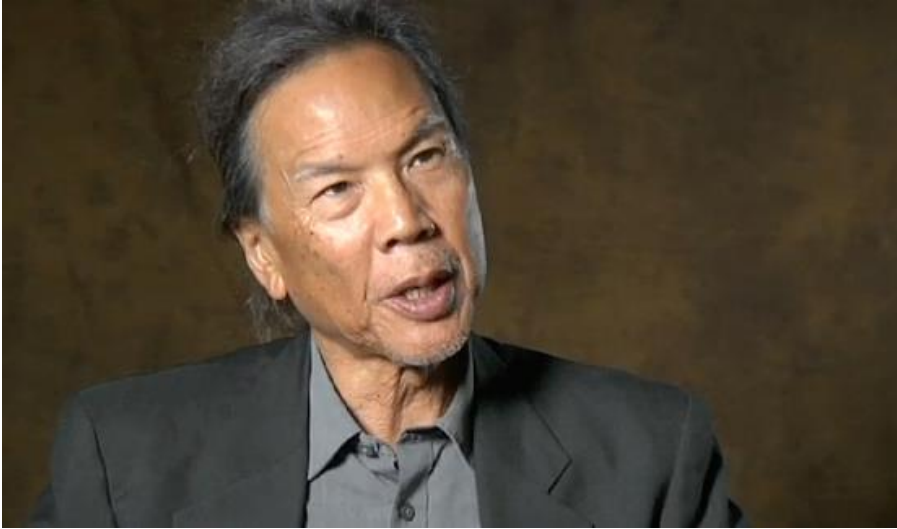


Image 3: image from S2021 question 7

Image 3 comes from S2021 examination's question 7, which is titled 'Critical Literacy'. In this question, the examinees are instructed to fill out the blanks in a short summary of a recording of a man called Allan Luke talking about critical literacy. Image 3 is a still picture of Allan Luke speaking, which means that it can be categorised as a context-based visual clue. This image does not directly aid the examinees in finding the correct answer, as it does not really relate to either the vocabulary used in the listening comprehension material or the text in the question, nor their contents.



Image 4: image from S2018 question 6

Image 4 comes from S2018 examination's question 6, which has the title 'Airplane Contrails'. The instructions of the question tell the test takers to choose the correct alternative to multiple-choice questions based on what they hear in a podcast. This image pictures airplane contrails in the sky, which are also the topic of the questions. As such, the image can help the examinees to orient to the topic and perhaps also receive some aid in vocabulary recognition.



Image 5: image from A2022 question 8

Image 5 comes from the A2022 examination's question 8, which is titled 'Wood-burning Stoves'. There are multiple elements that are portrayed in the image, including a wood-burning stove. It is possible that apart from steering the examinees' attention to the topic of the question, it is also intended to help them to recognise the meaning of the word.

A more unusual type of multimodal element embedded in the questions comes in form of images as answer options in multiple-choice questions. These instances are illustrated in figure 2 in orange colour. These kinds of images have only appeared in two out of six analysed

examinations. Interestingly, as the figure shows, these examinations were the two examinations immediately following their digitalisation, and do not seem to have been utilised after that. It should be noted that while there are three instances of these images in both of these examinations, they are included as three separate answer options to the same question in each of them. Because these types of images have only been included in two examinations, a question is raised on whether images as answer options were not perceived in a positive light. To make any relevant deductions about this, however, the images require to be investigated in more depth.

In the examination from spring 2018, the question which is answered by choosing the right image relates to the Hillsborough disaster². The examinees are asked to choose the alternative which best depicts the incident. The first image depicts commotion among the audience on the bleachers, the second a conflict among football players, and the third a conflict between the police and some citizens. Image 6 below depicts the answer options as they were shown in the examination. The selection of the correct alternative based on the listening comprehension material recording seems quite straightforward, and it seems that the purpose of the question is to find out whether the examinees can form a correct overall understanding of what has happened based on the recording.

² The Hillsborough disaster was a fatal incident that took place 15th of April 1989 during a football game in Sheffield, England. 97 people were killed and hundreds injured after spectators were crushed into a metal barrier.

5.1. What happened at the Hillsborough stadium? (2 p.)



Image 6: screenshot of question 5.1 from S2018 examination

The other question containing images as answer options, which comes from the examination of autumn 2018, seems to be somewhat less straightforward at first glance. This is due to the different nature of the images. In this question, the images that are provided as answer options are much more similar with each other than in the corresponding question from the previous examination. In question 3.2, the listening comprehension material provided is a video of a man called Leon Botstein discussing art. The examinees' task is to choose the alternative that they believe best qualifies as art in Botstein's opinion. All three alternative images are black and white portraits of people wearing different types of masks. Image 7 below depicts these answer options. In order to correctly answer the question, the examinees are expected to apply the criteria provided in the listening comprehension material to the images provided in the answer options, and see which of them best fulfils said criteria.

3.2. In Botstein's view, which of the following portraits would most likely be considered a piece of art? (2 p.)

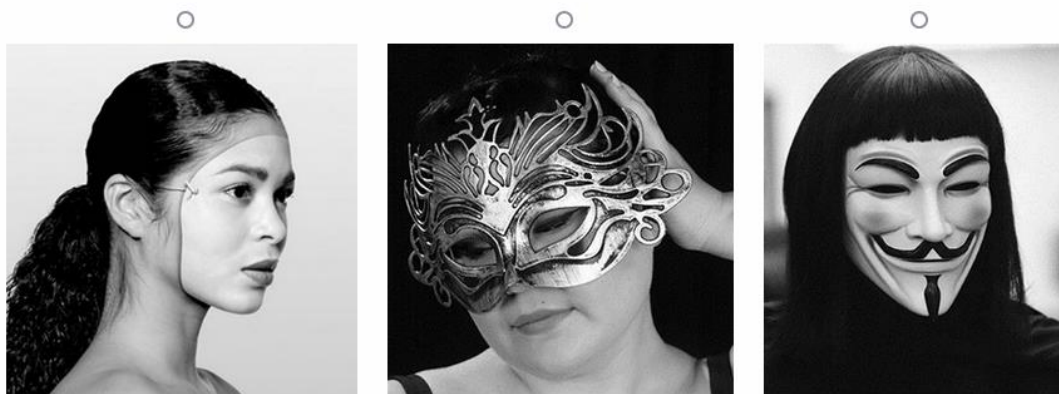


Image 7: screenshot of question 3.2 from A2018 examination

4.4 Accents in the listening comprehension questions

As discussed previously in the theoretical background section, one potential problem that individuals might struggle with when taking listening comprehension examinations arises from the use of different accents in the audio material. This subchapter looks into analysing what distinct accents can be found from the listening comprehension examinations' listening comprehension materials and discusses how they might potentially affect the examinees' understanding of them. In general, the language and speech selected for use in the matriculation examinations seems to be very clear and carefully articulated, and most of the speakers' accents are either standard British or standard American accents. There are, however, some exceptions, which I will next look into more closely. Additionally, I will also make comparisons between examinations from before and after the digitalisation of the matriculation examinations and see whether the employment of speakers of different accents has changed in any way.

Table 4 below lists all the accents that were included in the questions in the listening comprehension sections of the advanced syllabus level matriculation examinations of English as a foreign language. In the cases where accents other than British or American standard accents are included, it should be noted that the speech is still quite clear and easily intelligible,

and the accents are quite ‘weak’ in comparison with what one might encounter in real life situations.

Examination held	Accents included in the questions and the listening comprehension material
Spring 2016 (paper)	Standard British, Standard American
Autumn 2017 (paper)	Standard British, Standard American
Spring 2018	Standard British, Standard American, Australian, Scouse
Autumn 2018	Standard British, Standard American, Scottish, New Zealand
Autumn 2019	Standard British, Standard American, Scottish, Indian, Irish
Spring 2020	Standard British, Standard American, Scottish, Australian, South African
Spring 2021	Standard British, Standard American, Scottish, Indian
Autumn 2022	Standard British, Standard American, Scottish, Australian

Table 4: Accents in listening comprehension questions.

All in all nine distinct accents could be differentiated from the examined matriculation examinations. The traditionally favoured British and American standard accents seem to have preserved their position, as they are still included in all of the matriculation examinations held. This does not pose a great surprise, because they have historically been the accents taught in schools all over the world, and additionally currently still have a large number of speakers. It is worth noticing, however, that after the change in the format of the listening comprehension examination from paper to digital, the variety of accents included in the listening comprehension questions and listening comprehension material has widened quite considerably. In whole, seven accents other than the two previously mentioned could be found from them, including Australian, Scouse, Scottish, New Zealand, Indian, Irish, and South African accents.

As stated, quite interestingly in both of the two observed matriculation examinations from before their digitalisation, no accents other than British and American standard accents were included. Furthermore, in them the number of different speakers in the material was limited, meaning that the same few people's speech was used in multiple different questions. This highlights the material as consisting of scripted speech. Perhaps one of the reasons for the increase in the number of accents employed in the digitalised examinations lies in the widening of variety in the listening comprehension material sources and question types included.

Perhaps the most interesting one of the accents included is Scouse, which is the accent associated with the city of Liverpool in Northern England and its surrounding areas. It can be found from the spring 2018 examination in question 5, where one of the subquestions includes a snippet of an interview with a Hillsborough disaster survivor. What makes it interesting is that it stands out from the other accents used in the matriculation examination listening comprehension sections by belonging to a quite specific geographical area, while the rest of the accents employed in the examinations may be seen to belong to more general location, such as countries.

Apart from simply having more accents in the digitalised matriculation examinations, the variety of speakers in general is more diverse than earlier on. There are many potential reasons for this development. The first one concerns the changes that have been implemented in the national curriculum for upper secondary education. As mentioned earlier on in the theoretical background section of the thesis, in the newer 2019 curriculum new mentions of global perspectives have been added, as opposed to the 2015 curriculum, which has fewer of these points. The English as a lingua franca (ELF) perspective has gained in popularity and been added to the national core curriculum. The main point of the ELF perspective is that the most important function of language use is successful communication, which requires the hearer to be able to decode what the speaker is communicating.

Another important reason for the extension in the variety of accents is, as mentioned earlier on, the inclusion of new types of material for language input, which in turn is directly linked to the change in the examination format. Apart from simply providing new types of material, a considerable amount of the material also changed in the sense that while the nearly, if not all, of the material pre-digitalisation consists mainly of scripted speech, the material post-digitalisation also includes a lot of authentic language in different forms.

The instances where different types of videos are used as a form of listening comprehension material are also interesting in the sense that the language used in some of them cannot strictly be categorised as authentic speech, as they have probably been scripted beforehand. They do, however, still differ from the scripted audio-only material used for example in the listening comprehension material for the listening comprehension parts of the matriculation examinations held before their digitalisation.

The speech and the pronunciation of the speakers in the listening comprehension material of the listening comprehension examinations held before the digitalisation is very clear and the accents are not very strong. As mentioned earlier, the accents also only included British and American standard accents, that are likely to be very familiar to the examinees, because they are also the accents that can be most widely heard in their everyday life, for example in entertainment and media.

The situation is somewhat different in the listening comprehension sections of the matriculation examinations held after their digitalisation. In addition to including a wider variety of different accents from around the world, the speech and pronunciation is not as clear in all cases. An important reason for this lies in the inclusion of authentic language input.

5 DISCUSSION

In the previous chapter I presented the findings that were made by observing eight randomly selected advanced level matriculation examinations of English as a foreign language. The purpose of the current chapter is to observe these results and discuss the most important findings that were made in the previous chapter. In this chapter I will also attempt to answer the research questions that were presented in the introduction chapter of the thesis, which included the following:

1. What kinds of changes have the listening comprehension parts of matriculation examinations of English as a foreign language went through in the recent years surrounding their digitalisation?
2. What is the role of multimodality in the listening comprehension examinations, and how has it changed after the digitalisation process?

There are some key findings and generalisations that can be made by observing the different examinations and comparing them with each other. Naturally, as the extent of the material studied in the current thesis is quite restricted, the findings cannot be taken as the universal truth, but they can still be considered to showcase approximate tendencies. The first main point that can be made from the results of the thesis is that the change in the mode of the matriculation examinations from paper to digital has allowed the test makers to include listening comprehension material for the listening comprehension part to include a far wider variety of material than before. There are many new types of language input that have since the digitalisation been included in the examinations. These types include talk shows, video blogs,

descriptions, advertisements, announcements, pitches, interviews and audiobooks, none of which can be found from the matriculation examination held before the digitalisation. Apart from the widening in the variety of different types of material, there has also been another change concerning the listening comprehension material. That is, whereas in the matriculation examinations that were held before digitalisation, the vast majority of the language input included came in the form of scripted language recorded in a studio, in the more recent post-digitalisation examinations much of the material is authentic language instead.

It is also noteworthy that in addition to the employment of a number of new types of listening comprehension material, the whole structure of the matriculation examination of English as a foreign language has gone through a major change. Whereas in the pre-digitalisation era the listening comprehension part of the examination was taken in its own sitting, separate from the written part of the examination, the two have now been combined. This has increased the examinees' possibilities to decide in which order they want to complete the examination. They are also now free to decide in which order they desire to answer the listening comprehension questions, increasing their ability to choose for themselves, whereas before the digitalisation everyone had to complete them in a designated order and in a pre-set pace. In some of the questions there are still restrictions, however, to the number of times that the test takers are allowed to listen to specific recordings.

The next important finding is that after the digitalisation, the listening comprehension parts of the matriculation examinations started to include multimodal material alongside the strictly audio material that they consisted of before. This multimodal material comes in different forms: in the listening comprehension material, it is included as different types of video material. In the results section these videos were grouped into multiple different categories, which included talk shows, documentaries, video blogs, speeches, presentations, and advertisements. In the questions themselves, the multimodal elements are included in the

form of different kinds of images, that are either accompanying the question and its instructions, or as answer options for the questions. The purposes for including images are varying.

The answering instructions and options have also gone through some transformation alongside the digitalisation process. The answering instructions provided for the questions have become lengthier after the digitalisation: whereas the instructions given in the paper examination sheets were very brief and condensed, the answering instructions given for questions in the digitalised examinations provided more details concerning the type of the listening comprehension material, and in what order the examinee should start approaching the question (e.g. reading the question first and then listening to the listening comprehension material).

During the examined period there was also some variation in which questions words were favoured in the listening comprehension questions. Overall, *what* was used by far the most, over a hundred times in total. Interestingly, the listening comprehension section of the S2016 examination only used this question word. This is not likely to be due to the paper format of the examination, as the listening comprehension section of the A2017 examination did not follow a similar tendency. *Why* and *how* were the second most used question words, and *who* and *which* were used the least. There are also question words such as *where* that were not used at all.

There are different types of questions that are included in the listening comprehension parts of the matriculation examinations, out of which four distinct ones were identified in this thesis. Some questions are mainly intended to test the test takers' vocabulary knowledge, and in these questions the correct answers are straightforwardly deducible from the word choices in the listening comprehension material and the answer options. Other questions require more complex processes from the examinees, for example they might be expected to choose the most

polite answer to a question by listening to tones of voice and the use of politeness strategies. There is also a new type of answer option to be found in the digitalised matriculation examinations, which includes images as answer options. In these questions, the examinees must choose the correct image based on what they hear in the listening comprehension material.

The final important finding is that in the time period observed in this thesis, the number of accents that have been included in the listening comprehension sections has widened quite considerably. While in the examinations held before the digitalisation the accents only included British and American standard accents, the variety has since widened to include accents from other countries, including Scottish, Australian, Indian, New Zealand, Irish and South African accents. There are more than one potential reasons behind this development. Perhaps the most important of them is the change in the national core curriculum towards more mentions of international Englishes and the English as a lingua franca view. The current national core curriculum strongly steers English teaching towards an even more global view of the English language.

It should be taken into account that the observations and conclusions that can be made from the findings of this thesis are limited due to the restricted number of matriculation examinations of English as a foreign language that were studied. In order to make more generalisations and accurate findings, a larger variety of examinations should be included in the research. Additionally, research could be expanded to also include the basic syllabus level examinations, as the current study only had its focus in the advanced syllabus level examinations.

In future studies, it would be interesting to expand on the topic of the current thesis to include a larger number of matriculation examinations from a longer period of time. The topic could also be expanded to include matriculation examinations from different syllabus levels. Finally, similar research into the developments of the matriculation examinations of English as

a foreign language could be conducted with the focus in the written part of the examination.

For example, has multimodality become a more important part of them as well?

6 CONCLUSION

In this study my aim was to examine the listening comprehension parts of the advanced syllabus level matriculation examinations of English as a foreign language and see what kinds of changes they have gone through in the recent years surrounding their digitalisation process. The research was realised by randomly choosing eight matriculation examinations' listening comprehension sections, two from before digitalisation and two from after it, and placing them under scrutiny, examining them both individually, and in comparison with each other. The research was conducted by using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

It was found that the change in the mode of these examinations has had quite notable influence on them, both in terms of their form and their contents. Additionally, both the listening comprehension material chosen for the questions and the questions themselves have been subject to changes during the observed time period. This thesis provides a basic overview of the listening comprehension parts of matriculation examinations as they are today. To form an even more in-depth picture, more matriculation examinations from a longer time period could be included in the research material, also including the basic syllabus level examinations.

As stated before, the Finnish matriculation examinations have for a long time been an integral part of many adolescents' education, and it does not seem like that is going to change in the upcoming years. The role that the results of specific examinations have on the futures of the individuals may go through some changes from time to time, as for example the universities change their selection criteria, but nonetheless they maintain their overall importance. This is why it remains important to both study these examinations and their changes, as well as continue developing them to be as good as possible, maintaining and improving their most important qualities.

It is important to continue the process of reviewing the matriculation examinations critically, because they have the potential to have such a large impact on the future of the individuals taking the examinations. In this thesis, I divided the listening comprehension questions into four distinct categories, according to what kinds of skills the examinee needs to apply in order to answer them. In future research, it would be interesting to build on this division by analysing with quantitative methods if the use of these questions has changed with time. Apart from only observing the listening comprehension sections of the matriculation examinations, the research should also take into account the written parts of the examinations, and the combination of these parts as a matriculation examination in whole. This could serve as a potential topic in new research papers. The role of multimodality could also remain one of the points of observation in these new studies.

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