

A Comparison of Test Content: the IELTS and TOEFLiBT Listening Tests

Nguyen Thi Nhan Hoa*

VNU International School, Building G7, 144 Xuan Thuy, Cau Giay, Hanoi, Vietnam

Received 03 April 2017

Revised 30 May 2017; Accepted 28 June 2017

Abstract: The study compares the content of two internationally popular EFL tests: the IELTS and TOEFLiBT. It focuses on one component which Vietnamese students often find most challenging: the listening one. Framework for comparison is generalized from Bachman (1990), Bachman and Palmer (1996), Bejar et al (2000) and Buck (2001). Findings reveal that the two listening tests share some similarities but many differences in the facet of test rubric and facets of test input.

Several similarities can be seen in test rubric such as salience of parts, sequence of parts, relative importance of parts and time allocation. As regard to test input, the two tests also have several same features in format, nature of language input (lexical density, mode of presentation, genre and text types).

Many differences between the two tests can be seen and the most prominent ones are specification of procedure and task, situation inputs in the form of situation prompts, listening text length and number of fillers in the listening texts. These differences might imply that the two tests measure different underlying constructs. Analytical evidence of these differences can be beneficial for both test takers and test trainers while preparing for a test as well as making a choice of which test is more suitable for them.

Keywords: IELTS, TOEFLiBT, test comparison, listening test, test content.

1. Statement of the problem

Comparisons of different language test batteries have attracted attention of researchers in testing area (see Geranpayeh 1994 [1], Bachman, Davidson, Ryan, & Choi 1995 [2], Vu 1997 [3], O'Loughlin 2001[4], Nguyen 2008 [5]). In Vietnamese context, not many attempts have been made to compare tests, particularly tests used for the same purposes.

Recently, the Ministry of Education Training (MOET) has just issued Circular 08/2017/TT-BGDĐT (on April 4th, 2017) [6] which requires candidates who are applying to study for Ph.D degrees to have an official English certificate (Academic IELTS ≥ 5.0 or TOEFLiBT ≥ 45) which is recognized in Vietnam as well as in the world. This English requirement is roughly equal to B1 level in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)* as specified in Circular 05 /2012/TT- BGDĐT (dated February 15th, 2012) [7].

* Tel.: 84-1236439978.

Email: nguyenthinhanhoa@gmail.com

<https://doi.org/10.25073/2588-1116/vnupam.4097>

As both IELTS and TOEFLiBT tests are equally accepted in Vietnam, candidates often find it difficult to make a choice between these two tests. They are likely to turn to their teachers or those who have taken either test for advice. The given advice might be bias as it is often based on personal experience rather than a scientific analysis of the test content to help the potential candidates make the right choice. This paper, therefore, will focus on comparison between the IELTS and TOEFLiBT (specifying on the component which seems most challenging to Vietnamese students: the listening component). It is based on theoretical frameworks of listening test content provided in literature.

2. A comparison of the content of the IELTS and TOEFLiBT listening tests

The analysis of test content will focus on (i) *facets of test rubric* and (ii) *facets of the input*.

This framework was generalized from those of Bachman (1990) [8], Bachman and Palmer (1996) [9], Bejar et al (2000) [10], and Buck (2001) [11]. It will start from the format of the two tests in general and demonstrated by two specific versions: *the IELTS Specimen listening test 2005* and *the TOEFL iBT 2005* as the formats of these two tests correspond exactly like those in the authentic tests.

2.1. The comparison of the IELTS and the TOEFL iBT listening test rubric

There are four components of the test rubric: (i) test instructions, (ii) test organization, (iii) time allocation, and (iv) scoring method. A comparison between the two listening tests will be made with respect to each of these components.

2.1.1. Test instructions

Test instruction is the first component in the test rubric.

Table 1. Facet of test rubric: instructions of the IELTS and the TOEFL iBT listening tests

Categories of test method facets	The IELTS listening test	The TOEFL iBT listening test
1. FACETS OF TEST RUBRIC		
1.1 Instructions		
Language (native, target)	English	English
Channel (aural, visual)	Aural and visual	Aural and visual
Specification of procedures and tasks	(1) Listening to instructions (2) Viewing questions (3) Listening to the tape (4) Answering questions while listening (5) Checking answers before moving to a new section (6) Checking all answers by the end of the listening test (7) Transferring all the answers into the answer sheet.	(1) Listening to instructions (2) Listening to each section and taking notes (3) Listening and viewing questions (4) Using notes and/or information stored in the memory to answer questions (5) Each question must be answered before moving to the next one. *Test takers can control the speed of answering questions within 20 minutes given.

The IELTS and the TOEFL iBT listening tests are identical in terms of ‘*language and channel of instructions.*’ Both tests use the target language (English) in the instructions. In addition, test takers can listen and see instructions at the same time while doing the tests.

In contrast, the ‘*specification of procedures and task*’ across the two listening tests are very different as shown in Table 1. While listening to instructions is the first step, test takers are instructed to go through very different procedures while doing the IELTS and the TOEFL iBT. Firstly, the IELTS listening test asks test takers to read questions before listening while the TOEFL iBT listening test only reveals questions to test takers after they have listened to the entire listening stimulus of a section. Secondly, the IELTS listening test

instructs test takers to answer questions while listening whereas the TOEFL iBT listening test gives test takers time to answer questions after the listening stimulus of each section finishes. In addition, in the TOEFL iBT listening test, test-takers can control their speed of answering within the 20 minutes given, which they cannot do in the IELTS listening test as they have to answer questions while listening. In other words, the audio tape used in the IELTS listening test controls the test takers’ speed of answering.

2.1.2. Test organization

The following table will briefly summarize the brief information about test organization across the IELTS and the TOEFL iBT listening tests.

Table 2. Facet of test rubric: test organization of the IELTS and the TOEFL iBT listening tests

Categories of test method facets	The IELTS Specimen listening test 2005	The TOEFL iBT practice listening test 2005
1. FACETS OF TEST RUBRIC		
1.2 Test organization/structure		
Saliency of parts	2 parts: everyday spoken English and academic English (1) Everyday context: 1 conversation (An interview between a policeman and a witness) 1 monologue (A recorded message giving information about an English hotel.) (2) Academic-related context: 1 conversation: (Three students talking about their study program.) 1 monologue mini-lecture: (A talk by a university lecture in Australia on a type of bird in Tasmania.)	2 parts: academic English only (1) Part 1: 1 conversation of class related (A talk between a lecturer and a student about her missing from class and the handout she missed.) 2 lectures: (Biology: sound development in birds and History: the development of a historical place.) (2) Part 2: 1 conversation of campus related (A talk between a student and a librarian about looking for reference books in the library) 2 lectures (Business and Astronomy: Pluto)
Sequence of parts	Everyday context followed by academic-related context, each of which consists of conversation followed by a monologue.	Part 1 followed by part 2, each of which consists of a conversation on either class- or campus-related followed by two academic mini lectures

Relative importance of parts	All sections are equally important: - 10 questions for each section - 1 point is given to each correct answer	Two parts are equally important: - 17 questions for each part - 1 point is given to each correct answer However, within each part, the lectures are slightly more important than the conversation as there are: - only 5 questions on each conversation - 6 questions on each lecture.
------------------------------	---	---

From Table 2, it can be seen that the two tests are rather similar with respect to salience of parts as each of them consists of two equal parts. Each part of the IELTS listening test has one conversation and one monologue. Each part of the TOEFL iBT listening test has one conversation and two mini-lectures. The differences between the two tests are: the IELTS makes a clear distinction between the everyday context (part 1) and the academic-related context (part 2) whereas in the TOEFL iBT the two parts are very similar. In addition, the IELTS has both everyday context and academic context while the TOEFL iBT relates only to the university context.

As regards to the sequence of parts in the test, the two tests are similar in the sense that the conversation is followed by a mini lecture (part 2: academic English sections of the IELTS and part 1, 2 of the TOEFL iBT).

The IELTS and the TOEFL iBT listening tests are also similar with respect to the relative importance of parts. The two stages of the IELTS are equally weighted and so are the two parts of the TOEFL iBT. In addition, each question within either the IELTS or the TOEFL iBT is given one point. The differences between them are the importance of each section within a part or stage in the test. In the IELTS listening test, all four sections are equally weighted as 10 questions (worth 10 marks) are given to each section. In the TOEFL iBT listening test, however, only 5 questions are given to a conversation whereas 6 questions are given to a

lecture and the marks for each sub-section vary accordingly. In other words, the lectures in the TOEFL iBT have slightly more weighting than the conversations. Another source of evidence to show that the lectures in the TOEFL iBT are more important than the conversations is that the number of lectures in the TOEFL iBT test is twice the number of conversations. Thus more points are given to the lectures than to the conversations.

In short, there are both similarities and differences in test organization across the IELTS and the TOEFL iBT listening tests. However, the similarities outweigh the differences and we can say that *the two tests are only slightly different in test organization*.

2.1.3. Time allocation

The two tests are also rather similar in terms of time allocated to the listening stimulus (approximately within 30 minutes). The time allocation for the separate sections within the two tests, however are different, varying from about 2 minutes to 9 minutes. In the IELTS listening test, the time allocated to conversations is longer than the time allocated to the monologue (namely a recorded message and mini-lecture) whereas the reverse is true for the TOEFL iBT listening test.

The most prominent difference in time allocation across the two tests is the time given for answering questions. In the IELTS test takers answer questions while listening and then are given time to check them at the end of each section, thus they are given 10 minutes to

transfer their answers onto the answer sheet. In the TOEFL iBT, test takers answer questions after they have listened to the whole listening stimulus of a conversation or lecture, thus they

are given double the amount of time: 20 minutes in total to read questions and answer all of them.

Table 3. Facet of test rubric: time allocation of the IELTS and the TOEFL iBT listening tests

Categories of test method facets	The IELTS Specimen listening test 2005	The TOEFL iBT practice listening test 2005
1. FACETS OF TEST RUBRIC		
1.3 Time allocation	Approximately 40 minutes in total: - 30 minutes to listen to instruction and all listening stimuli including (i) reading questions before listening (ii) answering questions while listening and (iii) checking answers by the end of each section (some pauses are given within and between sections) - 10 minutes to transfer the answers to the answer sheet	Approximately 50 minutes in total: - 30 minutes to listen to instruction and all the listening stimulus (some pauses are given between sections) - 20 minutes in total to answer all 34 questions

2.1.4. Scoring method

The explicitness of criteria for correctness across the two tests shares some similarities in using multiple-choice format: test takers are asked to choose one/two/three given options for each question. In addition, the TOEFL iBT has

one question in which candidates are requested to tick ‘YES’ or ‘NO’ in a box referring to several steps in a process which is more or less similar to the multiple-choice format as shown below.

Table 4. Facet of test rubric: scoring method of the IELTS and the TOEFL iBT listening tests

Categories of test method facets	The IELTS Specimen 2005 listening test	The TOEFL iBT 2005 listening test
1. FACETS OF TEST RUBRIC		
1.4 Scoring method		
Explicitness of criteria for correctness Areas of language knowledge, communicative abilities, task completion	Writing a limited number of words and/or number in an answer, eg. NOT more than two words and/or a number for each answer. Choosing one/two given letter (A-C) or (A-E) for each answer.	Choosing one/two given letter (A-D) or three letters (A-E) for each answer Choosing ‘YES’ or ‘NO’ to a step in a process description.
	No partial credit is given.	No partial credit is given.

The most noticeable difference between the two tests in 'explicitness of criteria for correctness' is that the IELTS listening test has 28/40 questions (70%) asking test takers to write a short answers with a limited number of words (NOT more than two or three) and/or number in an answer whereas the TOEFL iBT test requires no written answers.

The scoring of the two listening tests used in this study is similar in the sense that (i) no credit point is given to a partially correct answer and (ii) each question in either the IELTS or the TOEFL iBT listening test is worth one point. For example, question 6 in the IELTS Specimen listening test 2005 asks test takers to

Choose TWO letters, A-F

6. The bag contained

- A. a purse
- B. £50
- C. a cheque book
- D. a cheque card
- E. a bus pass
- F. a door key

Test takers have to put "A (and) E" to obtain 1 point. If only one of the two letters is correct, the answer is marked wrong.

Similarly, question 15 in Part 2 of the TOEFL iBT practice listening test 2005 asks test takers as follows:

15. According to the discussion, what are some reasons for NOT classifying Pluto as a planet?

Click on 3 answers.

- (a). It has an atmosphere.
- (b). It is located in the Kuiper belt.
- (c). It is composed of rock and ice.
- (d). It is located too far from the Sun.

(e). It is much smaller than the other planets.

Test takers have to tick options (b), (c), and (e) to obtain one point. If only one or the two options they tick are correct, they do not get any credit.

In short, there exist a lot of similarities and several differences in the test rubric across the IELTS and the TOEFL iBT listening tests. Among them, the most prominent difference is the 'specification of procedures and tasks'. This difference may reflect differences in the underlying listening construct of the two tests.

2.2. The comparison of the IELTS and the TOEFL iBT listening test input

Three components of the test input will be used to compare the IELTS and the listening tests: (i) the format of input, (ii) the situation prompt/ topic, and (iii) the nature of language.

2.2.1. Test input format across the IELTS and the TOEFL iBT listening tests

In terms of test input format, the IELTS and the TOEFL iBT are nearly similar in every aspect except for two noticeable differences. The first difference is the TOEFL iBT provides more visual prompts than the IELTS listening test. In the TOEFL iBT, test takers can see the setting of *an office, a classroom, or library desk...* They also can see some technical terms on the screen as the lecturers mention them or illustrative pictures of what the lecturer is explaining or talking about. In the IELTS, the main channel is aural. Visual input is very limited with the exception of a map provided in question 1 and 2 and a table of missing information in sections 1, 2 and 4. The second important difference is the total length of text input: the TOEFL iBT is approximately 1.5 times longer than the IELTS listening test.

Table 5. A comparison of test input format across *the IELTS and the TOEFL iBT listening test*

Categories of test method facets	The IELTS Specimen listening test 2005	The TOEFL iBT practice listening test 2005
2. FACET OF TEST INPUT		
2.1 Format		
Channel of presentation (aural, visual)	Aural and visual (map)	Aural and visual (picture, technical words on the screen)
Mode of presentation (receptive)	Receptive	Receptive
Form of presentation (language, non language, both)	Both language and non language	Both language and non language
Vehicle of presentation ('live', 'canned', both)	Canned (recorded)	Canned (recorded)
Language of presentation (native, target, both)	Target (English)	Target (English)
Length	2419 words	3716 words
Degree of speededness	Average: 162 WPM	Average: 155WPM

The mean average speech rates of all sections across the two listening tests are highly similar (162 WPM and 155WPM) and approximately normal compared to the average natural speech rate range suggested by different researchers in literature (147 - 190 WPM) (see Kenedy 1978[13], Pimsleur, Hancock, and Furey 1977 [12], Rubin 1994[14], and Buck 2001 [11]). It is worth noticing, however, that (i) the average speech rate of each section in either the IELTS or the TOEFL iBT listening

test is slightly different and (ii) the TOEFL iBT listening test has a narrower range of speech rates than the IELTS listening test.

2.2.2. Test input situation prompts across the IELTS and the TOEFL iBT listening tests

Test input situation prompts across the two tests share both similarities and differences as shown in the following table:

Table 6. A comparison of test situation prompts across the IELTS and the TOEFL iBT listening tests

Categories of test method facets	The IELTS Specimen listening test 2005	The TOEFL iBT practice listening test 2005
2.2 Situation prompts		
1. Participants		
Ordinary people	√	
Students	√	√
Lecturers	√	√
Librarian(s)		√
2. Topic		
University-related	√	√
Everyday life related	√	
3. Setting		

University (Study or Service locations)	√	√
Other locations	√	
4. Situation visual		
Topic,	√ (topic can be predicted by questions preview of the listening passage)	√
Setting,		√
Participants,		√

As the IELTS covers the topics of both everyday life and university-related situations, it has participants and settings both at university (students, lecturer) and outside university (policeman, witness, hotel speaker). The TOEFL iBT, in contrast, only focuses on university-related topics, thus participants and settings of the listening stimulus are limited to university life.

In terms of situation visual, the TOEFL iBT listening test provides test takers with more visual clues than the IELTS listening test. The topic, the setting (classroom or library) and participants (lecturers, library staff, students) can be seen in the TOEFL iBT whereas in the IELTS listening test takers can see only the questions of the listening passage (including

phrases relating to the topics in these questions) and have to figure out the situation in which the listening stimulus take place. As stated in the Methodology, the TOEFL iBT listening test is done on computer thus it might be easier for it to provide situation visual prompts than the IELTS.

2.3. Nature of language input across the IELTS and the TOEFL iBT listening tests

The main components in the language input discussed by Buck (2001) [11] are: phonology, grammar, lexis, textual, functional and sociolinguistic knowledge. These features across the two tests can be summed up as follows.

Table 7. A comparison of nature of language across the IELTS and the TOEFL iBT listening tests

Categories of test method facets/ task characteristics	The IELTS Specimen listening test 2005	The TOEFL iBT practice listening test 2005
2.3 Nature of language input		
2.3.1 Phonology	Australian and British accents	American accent
2.3.2 Grammar	(see Table 8 for details in each section of the test)	(see Table 8 for details in each section of the test)
Average number of incomplete sentence/ greetings	2.95%	1.16%
Average number of shorten form/ simple sentence	43.28%	26.86%
Average number of Compound sentence	13.27%	6.09%
Average number of Complex/ Compound complex sentence	33.88%	30.36%
Average number of filler/ asking questions to check students' comprehension	6.61%	34.91%

2.3.3 Vocabulary: lexical density	0.51 (see Table 9 below for details)	0.49 (see Table 9 below for details)
2.3.4 Functional and sociolinguistic knowledge/ characteristics:		
- Genre/text type	- 2 conversation - 1 recorded message - 1 monologue lecture	- 2 conversation - 2 monologue lecture - 2 interactive lecture

2.3.1. Phonology

In terms of phonology, the IELTS and the TOEFL iBT declare that they use the accents of native English speaking countries such as British, Australian, American and Canadian. However, in the particular two tests used in this study, the IELTS contains both the British and Australian accents whereas the accents in the TOEFL iBT are American. Whether this is typical of all TOEFL iBT listening tests is uncertain.

2.3.2. Grammar

The analysis of grammar features of the listening input from the two tests will be viewed from average number of (i) incomplete sentence/ greetings, (ii) shorten form/ simple sentences, (iii) compound sentence, (iv) complex/ compound complex sentence, and (v) filler/ asking students to check their comprehension.

Table 8. Comparing grammar features across the IELTS and TOEFL iBT listening tests

	The IELTS Specimen 2005				TOEFL iBT listening practice test 2005					
	Section 1: Every-day Conversation	Section 2: Every-day Monologue	Section 3: Academic conversation	Section 4: Lecture	Part 1			Part 2		
					Conversation 1	Lecture 1	Lecture 2	Conversation 2	Lecture 3	Lecture 4
No of Incomplete sentence/ greetings	0 0%	1 5%	3 3.78%	1 3.03%	4 6.35%	0 0%	0 0%	2 3.17%	1 1.59%	0 0%
	2.95%				1.16%					
No of shorten form/ simple sentence	35 42.68%	10 50%	42 53.18%	9 27.27%	27 42.83%	7 14.90%	13 19.41%	22 34.92%	16 25.40%	18 23.69%
	43.28%				26.86%					
No of Compound sentence	2 2.44%	3 15%	9 11.39%	8 24.24%	10 15.87%	1 2.13%	2 2.99%	1 1.59%	3 4.76%	7 9.21%
	13.27				6.09					
No of Complex/ Compound complex sentence	31 37.81%	6 30%	20 25.32%	14 42.42%	8 12.70%	18 38.30%	31 46.27%	13 20.64%	17 26.98%	28 36.85%
	33.88%				30.36%					
No of filler/ asking questions to check students' comprehension	14 17.07%	0 0%	5 6.33%	1 3.03%	14 22.22%	21 44.68%	21 31.34%	25 39.68%	26 41.27%	23 30.26%
	6.61				34.91%					

Across the two tests, the most visibly similar grammar feature of listening input is a high percentage of simple sentences in conversation (at least one-third of the text input) whereas that percentage in lecture is low (approximately one-fourth of listening text). The most noticeable difference in listening input of the two tests is the percentage of fillers/asking students to check their comprehension. That percentage in the TOEFL iBT listening test is approximately 5 times higher than in the IELTS listening test (34.91 vs. 6.61%).

2.3.3 Vocabulary: Lexical density

Lexical density is a feature of task characteristics. It is believed that lexical density affects the difficulty level of the task: the higher the lexical density, the more difficult the task. To measure the lexical density of the two listening tests, a program available on the internet [<http://www.lexutor.ca/vp/>] was used. This program also breaks texts down by word frequency based on Laufer and Nation's Lexical Frequency Profiler. The words of texts are divided into first and second thousand levels, academic words, and the remainder or 'offlist' words as shown in the following table.

Table 9. Comparing lexical density across the IELTS and TOEFL iBT listening tests

	The IELTS Specimen listening 2005				The TOEFL iBT practice listening test 2005					
	Section 1: Every-day Conver-sation	Section 2: Every-day Mono- logue	Section 3: Acade-mic conver- sation	Section 4: Lecture	Part 1			Part 2		
					Conver- sation 1	Lecture 1	Lecture 2	Conver- sation 2	Lecture 3	Lecture 4
Total word in text	801	342	709	622	435	720	805	397	682	810
	2 474*				3 849*					
	Length average: 618.5				Length average: 641.5					
K1 words	727 (90.76%)	252 (73.68%)	621 (87.59%)	518 (83.28%)	381 (87.59%)	564 (78.33%)	641 (79.63%)	318 (80.10%)	555 (81.38%)	626 (77.28%)
- function word	449	124	384	314	254	328	399	201	351	397
	1 271				1 930					
- content words	278	128	237	204	127	236	242	117	204	229
	847				1 155					
K2 words	48	34	37	32	21	39	38	11	19	26
	151				133					
AWL words	3	22	21	19	6	19	22	14	58	16
Off-list words	23	34	30	53	27	98	104	54	50	142
Lexical density	0.44	0.64	0.46	0.50	0.42	0.54	0.50	0.49	0.49	0.51
	Lexical density average: 0.51				Lexical density average: 0.49					

*(In this table, the abbreviation words are counted as two separate words, thus the total number in each section is slightly higher compared to the total number of words section in Table 5 where abbreviation words are counted as 1 word.)

Note.

1. K1: the most frequent 1000 word families,
2. K2 : the second 1000,
3. The Academic Word List,
4. Words that do not appear on the other lists,
5. Lexical density: content words/total K1 words

It can be seen that more than 70% of vocabulary in all sections of either the IELTS or the TOEFL iBT listening tests come from the K1 list. This means that the two listening tests cover the basic vocabulary; thus new or technical terms might be not very challenging to test takers. It is worth acknowledging that both the function words and the content words in the TOEFL iBT listening test are approximately 1.5 times larger than those in the IELTS listening test (1930 vs. 1271 and 1155 vs. 847 respectively).

As regards to lexical density, the IELTS and the TOEFL iBT are also rather similar in terms of the average mean of all sections added together: 0.49 vs. 0.51. It is, however, worth noticing that (i) the lexical density of different sections in each test varies (ranging from .44 to .50 for the IELTS listening test, and .42 to .54 for the TOEFL iBT listening test) and (ii) this lexical density calculation only takes into account K1 words (the most frequent 1000 word families) as shown in table 9.

2.3.4. Genre and text types:

In terms of genre and text types, the two tests are rather similar containing both conversation and lecture genre. The only difference is the IELTS listening test has a monologue recorded message whereas the TOEFL iBT listening test does not. In contrast, the TOEFL iBT contains both monologue and interactive lectures whereas the IELTS listening test only has a monologue lecture.

3. Discussion

The content of the IELTS and the TOEFL iBT listening tests share both similarities and differences in test content (test rubric and test input). Similarities content between the two tests can be seen in test rubric (salience of parts, sequence of parts, relative importance of parts and time allocation) and test input, particularly language input (lexical density, mode of presentation, genre and text types). In contrast,

differences between them can be seen in *specification of procedures and task* (test rubric) and the *situational prompts, text length, text type* and *grammar feature (fillers)* (listening input).

The most important difference in test rubric is in the *specification of procedures and task* between the two listening tests. The IELTS test asks test takers to listen and answer questions while listening and so requires information processing on-line, thereby making limited demands on long-term memory. All test-takers have to do is to comprehend the delivered information at hand. The design of the test also allows test takers to read questions before actually listening to the stimulus of each section, thus prediction skills similar to those of the “real-world” listening context are likely to be employed. The TOEFL iBT listening task, in contrast, just gives test takers the topic of a listening passage and a visual representation of the listening setting. Thus test takers can only make a general prediction about what they are going to listen to. In addition, the questions only appear on the screen after the whole listening stimulus of a conversation or lecture has been completed; thus test takers must use their notes and memory to answer the questions. It can be argued that the TOEFL iBT listening tests not only comprehension but also memory and, to some extent, note taking skills. However, in most academic listening situations at university such as lecture/staff – student interactions, students have to take notes and use their notes to do tasks later. Thus it can be said that latter aspect, the TOEFL iBT listen tasks are more closely-related to university tasks.

In addition, as the IELTS requires test takers to answer questions while listening thus they have to make a good combination of several skills: reading questions, understanding information, matching information to the question and writing down the answer simultaneously. Undoubtedly, the pressure on test takers is huge because if they stuck at one item, they are likely to miss the next coming

one. In contrast, in the TOEFL iBT such a pressure is removed as test takers can control the speed of answering within given time after having listened to each listening section.

As regards with the listening input, the first difference between the two tests is *situational input* in the form of *situation prompts*. More of the visual prompts can be seen in the TOEFL iBT test such as the topic, the setting (classroom or library) and participants (lecturers, library staff, and students). In fact, test takers might, for example, feel as if they were sitting in the classroom and listening to a lecture as some think-aloud test takers commented in the interview after they finished the TOEFL iBT listening test. In this sense, we can say that the TOEFL iBT listening test is more closely to the real-life listening situation at the university than does the IELTS listening test.

The most noticeable and important difference of listening input across the two tests is the large difference of *listening text* length: the TOEFL iBT is approximately 1.5 times longer than the IELTS. This implies that the load of information processing in the TOEFL iBT is much heavier than that in the IELTS. Another significant difference in the listening text is the *genre*. The IELTS has both everyday spoken English and academic English whereas the TOEFL iBT only focuses on academic English. The TOEFL iBT consists of 4 lectures (monologue lecture and interactive lecture) whereas the IELTS has only 1 monologue lecture. This again emphasizes that the TOEFL iBT listening test is much more academic and university-oriented than the IELTS listening test.

The final important difference in the listening text between the two tests is the number of *fillers* which is approximately six times larger in the TOEFL iBT than in the IELTS listening test. This difference might indicate that the stimulus of the TOEFL iBT is more closely to the nature of spoken language than that in the IELTS listening test.

4. Conclusion

All the differences between the two tests in the test rubric and listening input discussed above might suggest some possible differences in the listening construct the two tests are trying to measure. It will be beneficial for test-takers to be fully aware of these differences before they make a decision to take which test – IELTS or TOEFLiBT. As for teacher and test trainers, an understanding of these differences will help them to give their students a suitable advice when being asked for.

References

- [1] Geranpayeh, A. Are score comparisons across language proficiency test batteries justified?: an IELTS - TOEFL comparability study. *Edinburgh Working Papers in Applied Linguistics* 5, 50-65. 1994
- [2] Bachman, L. F., Davidson, F., Ryan, K., & Choi, I. C. An investigation of comparability of two tests of English as a foreign language. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1995
- [3] Vu, T. P. A. Authenticity and validity in language testing: investigating the reading components of IELTS and TOEFL. Unpublished Ph.D, La Trobe University, Melbourne. 1997
- [4] O'Loughlin, K. The equivalence of direct and semi-direct speaking tests. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2001.
- [5] Nguyen, T. N. H. An Investigation into the Validity of Two EFL Listening Tests: IELTS and TOEFLiBT. Unpublished Ph.D, Melbourne University, Melbourne. 2008.
- [6] Circular 08/2017/TT-BGDĐT Introducing Regulations on Doctoral Enrolment and Training (on April 4th, 2017). Thông tư 08/2017/TT-BGDĐT ban hành quy chế tuyển sinh và đào tạo trình độ tiến sỹ.
- [7] Circular 05 /2012/TT- BGDĐT On the Issue of Fixing and Adding Several Regulations on Doctoral Training (enclosed with Circular 10/2009/TT-BGDĐT dated 07 May 2009 of the Minister of Ministry of Education and Training). Thông tư số 05 /2012/TT- BGDĐT Về việc sửa đổi, bổ sung một số điều của Quy chế đào tạo trình độ tiến sĩ (ban hành kèm theo Thông tư số 10/2009/TT-BGDĐT ngày 07 tháng 5 năm 2009 của Bộ trưởng Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo

- [8] Bachman, L. F. *Fundamental considerations in language testing*: Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1990.
- [9] Bachman, L. F., & Palmer, A. S. *Language testing in practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1996.
- [10] Bejar, I., Douglas, D., Jamieson, J., Nissan, S., & Turner, J. *TOEFL 2000: listening framework: a working paper*. (TOEFL Monograph No. 19.) Princeton, New Jersey: Educational Testing Service. 2000.
- [11] Buck, G. *Assessing listening*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2001.
- [12] Pimsleur, P., Hancock, C., & Furey, P. *Speech Rate and Listening Comprehension*. In Burt, M; Dulay, H; and Finocchiaro, M. *Viewpoints on English as a Second Language* (pp. 27-34). New York: Regents Publishing Company, Inc. 1997
- [13] Kennedy, G. D. *The testing of listening comprehension*. Singapore: Singapore University Press. SEAMEO Regional Language Centre. 1978.
- [14] Rubin, J. *A review of second language listening comprehension research*. *The Modern Language Journal*, 78(2), 199-221. 1994.