

THE PROGRESS OF THE FIRST SEMESTER STUDENTS IN LISTENING SKILL

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Abstract: This is a report of quantitative study on the development of listening score of the first semester students of English Department. The data are the students' score of four tasks: task 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9. The data reveal that there 7 students who could consistently improve, secondly consistently up and down improved as 22 students. It can be said that 22 students and the scores of other 22 students are up and down. It could be because of some problems such as having trouble of sounds, not knowing all the words, no understanding fast speech, such as natural native speech, no being able to keep up the native utterance, getting tired after joining other activities.

Key words: progress, listening skill

In the context of teaching and learning English in Indonesia, teaching the comprehension of spoken language in the target language (English) is of primary importance if the communication aim is to be achieved. A frequently neglected area, listening comprehension has its peculiar problems which arise from the fleeting, immaterial nature of spoken utterances and the complicated ways one processes what he or she hears. Sounds English and Indonesian), accent, vocabulary (collocation, idiomatic expression etc), syntactical pattern become their problems in listening activities. Most of them always complain about the sounds and many of students say that the sounds are not clear. The Indonesian accent is very clear. It means that the alphabets and the pronunciation are the same, but in English the alphabet or the words and the pronunciation are different. That's why it causes misinterpretation among the students. The next is vocabulary, it relates to the lack of collocation, idiomatic expression change one's mind means "decide to do something different from what had been decided earlier", drop someone a line means "send a letter or email to someone" Example: It was good to meet you and I hope we can see each other again. Drop me a line when you have time. Figure something out means "come to understand a problem". Many students are lazy to note down the new vocabulary. It is also added that the utterances are spoken too fast. The accent of native speaker is heard ambiguity; because some pronunciation likes *rhotic* and non *rhotic* speakers such as assimilation for example that boy heard *thap boy*, juncture, elision, and contraction.

Relating to that matter, the first semester students of English Department as learners in this case join in listening 1 are required to do some practices to

improve their listening skill. The practices consists of types of activities which motivates them to be active involved in answering the questions. Even though there are some problems arise in these activities but the students try hard to answer the questions. Every answer of their activities is scored by the lecturer in order to investigate their progress from time to time.

THE NATURE OF LISTENING SKILL

Listening is often erroneously considered a passive skill, in fact in order to decode the message that the speaker is delivering; the listener must actively contribute knowledge from both linguistic and non-linguistic sources. This view of listening would involve the learner in listening to the message, without paying attention to its component elements. Listening to a language can be defined as the ability to receive and decode oral communication by processing a language sample. Listening is a two-way process, involving reception, or the decoding of input, and production, involving predicting and compensating.

According to Mckeating (in McErlain, 1999: 78-79), the listener passes through certain process in constructing a message out of a stream of sound in L1 situation:

Perception

Perception of sounds refers to the process of identifying speech sounds. The listener uses linguistic knowledge to identify these and makes sense of the sound to which she is exposed by segmenting them into familiar units, recognising and using intonation to indicate word boundaries. Thus the learner is able to segment the flow of speech into meaningful parts.

Decoding

Decoding refers to the means by which the listener makes sense of the message by taking in chunks and not just sentences. This has implications for the teacher training the student to listen, not only for key words, but also for chunks of meaning. Each chunk should be recognized as meaningful and understood on reception and held in short term memory long enough for it to be related to what has gone before or what follows.

Prediction and Selection

The prediction of select items, accompanied by selective listening with a specific purpose in mind.

Out of this process come pieces of information which can be stored in the long-term memory for later recall. The process depends on recognizing lexical meaning, perceiving grammatical relationships signaled by word order, tense markers, structure words, cohesive devices, etc.

Speech perception and decoding do not proceed piecemeal, but form an integrative process. One cannot interpret speech at one level, without simultaneous knowledge on other levels. Perception requires understanding at the phrase level, as is evidenced by the experiments of Brevier et al. (in McErlain, 1999: 78-79).

Prediction of specific items with a high degree of accuracy helps the listener to listen without straining to catch every word. The prediction of unknown or unheard words reduces tension in the listener. Redundancy also helps the listener and has a role to play in ensuring the message is received. Selection refers to the process of sifting information and retrieving relevant information in a mass of data.

Oller (in McErlain, 1999: 79) uses the term *expectancy* to describe the fact that cognitive processes are dependent to a great extent on the human capacity to anticipate elements in the sequence of experience. This insight goes back to a series of experiments which show that the more predictable a series of elements becomes, the more readily it is processed. This *expectancy* grammar characterizes any form of comprehension. Brown (1994:256) concentrates on the understanding of spoken language.

According to Dirven (1977 in McErlain, 1999: 79), it is an almost impossible task to listen to excerpts of spontaneous speech and then to answer a series of content questions. What the listener should do is to use all possible cues to predict the factual content of the communication and its interactional structuring. Labov's semantic-pragmatic interpretation model was developed in the course of analysis of therapeutic discourse. The model claims to have validity for all types of face-to-face interaction and is thus of relevance to the question of listening skills.

According to Labov (in McErlain, 1999: 80), the highest linguistic unit is the speech event, comprising the following:

1. The actually spoken text.
2. The paralinguistic clues, revealed through such vocal elements as tenseness, hesitations, etc.
3. The common knowledge shared by speaker and hearer, including propositions deriving from earlier discourses or parts of the present discourse (Labov & Fanshell, 1977).

Halliday and Hasan (in McErlain, 1999: 80) also distinguish between the use of language which is *context bound* and that which is less so, the latter being characterised by exophoric reference, or reference to a shared world knowledge which is taken for granted in the conversation and not particularly referred to by the speaker. According to these writers, children's language is characterised by exophoric reference.

Labov and Fanshell (in McErlain, 1999: 80) are analyzing the speech event from the point of view of the interpreting observer and are concerned with a model for therapy. Nevertheless, the emphases on the paralinguistic messages which are passed from client to therapist have obvious implications for the teaching of listening skills. The question is raised concerning the extent to which listening is a purely auditory experience and the extent to which it is a visual one. It also raises the question of the shared world knowledge between the speaker and the listener and the degree to which this aids comprehension. From the point of view of our own teaching situation, the findings concerning the paralinguistic elements of listening have obvious implications for the type of listening media employed. If we are to contextualise input, to allow for the *context bound* nature of language, to increase motivation and allow input to be

comprehensible, by incorporating paralinguistic gestures, and generally take into account the fact that listening is not a purely auditory experience, we must inevitably employ a medium which incorporates the visual aspects of listening. This is, of course, easier said than done. The use of video, while it has several advantages, particularly when dealing with large groups of students, also has a series of disadvantages for those of us teaching in Higher Education. Firstly, as we pointed out at the beginning of this paper, reading has a high priority on the syllabus and, while audio tapes allow students to read and listen at the same time, videos, for the very reasons we find them useful in aiding comprehension, require our whole attention. Listening and note-taking skills, a prime objective of academic listening courses, can better be taught by using taped audio lectures. Moreover, the difficulty of finding suitable materials available in video is also a problem.

Having found video materials relevant to the discipline, the question then is how to exploit them in such a way as to provide useful learning material. While listening and reading simultaneously is not an option when using videos, the exploitation of the script as part of a pre-listening exercise provides useful reading practice. While there exists the difficulty of offering reading material employing spoken language and vice versa (in the case of taped lectures employing formal English), students bring to the listening task a shared knowledge of the discipline. Their familiarity with the concepts under discussion facilitates comprehension and boost confidence. It is useful to employ materials from areas of the discipline with which students are already familiar.

Based on the explanation above it could be concluded that the listener passes through certain process in constructing a message out of a stream of sound in L1 situation such as perception, decoding, prediction and selection- the prediction of select items, accompanied by selective listening with a specific purpose in mind.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING SKILL

Listening is not a passive skill, nor even, as has traditionally been believed, a receptive skill. Listening is a creative skill. In order to comprehend the sounds falling on learners' ears, the learners take raw material of words, the rise and fall of voice and from this material, learners create significance. There is meaning in the linguistic arrangement the speaker has produced, the speaker's meaning, but significance is in the mind of the listener.

According to Rivers (1981:160) significance which comes from the listener's side, is dependent on three factors as follows:

There is the linguistic information which is extracted from the sound signal, that is, what listeners perceive aurally of sounds, words, and their arrangements in utterances. What the listener perceives is not necessarily what is emitted by the speaker, but once the listener has selected a sequence from the original signal, the rest of sound signal slips from auditory memory and is no longer directly accessible for the reconstruction of an alternative message.

The situational context of the utterance affects what listeners perceive to be the relationship between they have heard and what has been said and also their expectations of what will follow.

The comprehended message is dependent on what the listener perceives to be the intentions of the speaker.

From that quotation above it can be implied that the listeners' significance depend on three factors those are linguistic information, situational context, and comprehended message.

THE PROBLEMS OF STUDENTS IN PRACTICING LISTENING SKILL

The students face some problem in listening activities. Ur (1996:111-112) implies that most of students have difficulties in conducting listening skills as follows:

They have trouble with sounds

Since most listeners rely mostly on context for, comprehension, they are often themselves unaware of inaccurate sound perception.

They have to understood every word

This is a very common problem, often unconsciously fostered by the teachers and/or listening comprehension materials which encourage the learners to believe that everything that is said bears (equally) important information. The effort to understand everything often results ineffective comprehension, as well as feeling fatigue and failure. Lectures/teachers may need to give learners practice in selective ignoring of heard information-something they do naturally in their mother tongue. Lectures/teachers should explain this point to the learners, and set them occasional task that ask them to scan a relatively long text for one or two limited items of information.

They can't understand fast, natural native speech

Learners will often ask teachers/lecturer to slow down and speak clearly- by which they mean pronounce each word the way it would sound in isolation; the temptation is to do as they. But if the lectures do what they want, lecturers are not helping them to learn to cope with everyday informal speech. They should be exposed to as much as spontaneous informal talk as they can successfully understand as soon as possible; and it is worth taking the time to explain to them why. One of the advantages of teacher-produced talk is that lectures can provide with this sort of discourse at the right level for them, getting faster and more fluent as their listening skills develop.

They need to hear things more than once

It is considered that there may be very good pedagogical reasons for the exposing learners to text. But the fact remains that in real life they are often going to have to cope with 'one-off' listening; and teachers/lecturers can certainly make a useful contribution to their learning if lecturers can improve their ability to do so. Lecturers can for example, try to use text include 'redundant' passages within which the essential information is presented more than once and not too intensively; and give learners the opportunity to request clarification or repetition during the listening.

They find it difficult to keep up

It seems that the learners over loaded with incoming information. The solution is not so much to slow down the discourse but rather to encourage them to relax, stop trying to understand everything, learn to pick out what is essential and allow them to ignore the rest.

They get tired

This is one reason for making listening comprehension passages too long overall, and for breaking them up into short 'chunks through pause, listener responses or change of speaker.

Based on the quotation above and from the observation, most of the students have the same difficulties as it is mentioned above.

METHOD

This study substantially applies quantitative approach (Creswell, 1994: 116), in the sense that it is intended to figure out the students' listening skill through their scores. Besides, this study is categorized into quantitative study given that in data analysis, it applies descriptive statistics (Wiersma, 1995: 337).

DATA

Data of this study are the students' scores of four tasks are: task 1, 3, 5, 7, 9. Tasks 1, 3,5,7,9 are used to find out the varieties scores.

SUBJECTS OF THE STUDY

The subjects of the present study are the students of semester 1 group D of English Department at STAIN. These groups of students take listening skill 1 subject as one of their compulsory subjects in the odd semester academic year 2009/2010. There are 29 students participating in this study as listed in table 1.

INSTRUMENTS

The main instrument of this study is the students' tasks. Each task consists of 4 (four) parts. In task 1, part 1 provides completion word from the cassette and order the pictures a-d the students hear them. Part 2 asks the students to write the people's names in the spaces in the conversations. Part 3 instructs the students to check the phrases when the students hear the conversation. Task 3 also consists of four parts; part 1 instructs the students to write the list of adjective in the chart. Part 2 instructs the students to number the pictures in the order of the recording. In Part 3, the students are asked to check their words in part 1 when the students hear them then in part 4 they are asked to compare their opinion to the people on the truck of recording. In task 5, the students are asked to match the types of show and titles and the students are asked to number the types of show in order of preference in part 1. Then next part the students are asked to listen to the radio shows on the recording. In part 3 they are instructed to give T or F by listening to the radio shows. In part 4, they must complete the sentences with the words or numbers they hear. In task

7, the instruction is match the description 1-5 with the pictures after/by looking at the pictures in part 1, second part the students listen to the instructions from the Yoga teacher and answer the questions. In Part 3 the students are asked to put the pictures in activity in order. In part 4 they are asked to complete the instruction with the word they hear. In task 9, part 1 the students are asked to match the dates and the historical events and write the dates out in full. In part 2 the students find the sentences True or False (F). In part 3 the students are asked to read and choose the correct meaning of Armstrong's words. In part 4 they are instructed to number the items in order of preference.

DATA ANALYSIS

The obtained data-the students' scores were analyzed by using descriptive statistics (Wiersma, 1995: 337). As the students completed their tasks, they were scored and graded. The final scores as listed in the table 1 is the accumulation of the whole grades of the whole parts in each task divided by the number of parts in each task or in other word it can be said that the score is got from the mean of each task (Butler, 1985: 27).

RESEARCH FINDINGS

After they completed the exercises in task 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, it could be got the result that there are two groups of students, who are classified into consistently improved as 7 students, consistently up and down improved as 22 students. It can be said that 22 students are classified as consistently improved because they got up and down consistently in their tasks 6 and 8. It also can be stated that there are 7 students who got consistently improved from task 1, 3, 5, 7 and 9.

Table 1. The Score of Listening of 1 D

No	Subject	Task 1	Task 3	Task 5	Task 7	Task 9	Criterion
1	Subject 1	15	40	70	90	60	CUD
2	Subject 2	35	60	50	70	70	CUD
3	Subject 3	35	60	85	90	80	CUD
4	Subject 4	30	40	60	70	80	CI
5	Subject 5	30	60	80	90	80	CUD
6	Subject 6	25	50	100	100	70	CUD
7	Subject 7	40	70	70	90	70	CUD
8	Subject 8	35	60	100	100	70	CUD
9	Subject 9	40	60	100	100	70	CUD
10	Subject 10	30	50	100	100	90	CUD
11	Subject 11	35	60	100	60	70	CUD
12	Subject 12	35	70	80	100	80	CUD
13	Subject 13	30	60	90	100	80	CUD
14	Subject 14	30	40	90	100	90	CUD
15	Subject 15	45	40	70	90	90	CUD
16	Subject 16	40	60	100	90	100	CUD

17	Subject 17	30	80	100	65	90	CUD
18	Subject 18	35	60	100	85	90	CUD
19	Subject 19	30	50	70	90	90	CI
20	Subject 20	35	50	70	90	95	CI
21	Subject 21	35	70	80	65	100	CUD
22	Subject 22	30	70	85	95	100	CI
23	Subject 23	30	70	85	100	95	CUD
24	Subject 24	25	60	80	85	90	CI
25	Subject 25	35	50	70	80	90	CI
26	Subject 26	40	60	70	75	100	CI
27	Subject 27	30	70	100	95	80	CUD
28	Subject 28	40	60	80	100	85	CUD
29	Subject 29	35	80	70	100	100	CUD

Note: *CUD* (consistently up down)
CI (consistently improved)

INTERPRETATION

Each score in each task of each student is compared. From the comparison the writer could see the students' progress, for example subject number 17 in task 1 she or he got 30 next in task 3, his or her improved 50 point or she or he got 80. Then in task 7 she or he got 100, it means that his or her score increased 20 point but in task 7 his or her score decreased into 65 or minus 35 finally his or her score improved into 90. It showed that the score of subject number 17 got fluctuate. In task 3, 5 his or her score improved but in task 7 his or her score decreased or got down.

Beside the students who got fluctuate scores, there are some students who got improved score or consistently improved. For example the subject number 22 in task 1 she or he got 30 and in the task 3 she or he got 70 so his or her score improved into 40 point next in task 5 she or he got 85. Her or his score got improved into 15 point then in task 7 her or his score improved into 95 or increased 15 point. Finally his or her score improved until 100 or increased 5 point. It means that some subject kept getting progress from the task 1, 3,5,7,9.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

To sum up the entire research, the result of this study suggest that listening skill could be improved by conducting and practicing several of listening activities regularly by noting down their score from time to time. It will be known their progress in participating listening; the result of their progress could be classified into two groups. The first group consists of 22 students who got up and down score or they are classified consistently up and down improved. There are 7 students are classified consistently improved. The result of their progress could be consistently improve or consistently up down because there are some factors such as having trouble of sounds, not knowing all the words, no understanding fast speech, such as natural native speech, no being able to keep up the native utterance, getting tired after joining other activities.

On the basis of finding, it is important to reveal both fundamental values and practical avenues for teaching listening. Creating any activities based on their needs, ability and curiosity in order to increase their motivation could be also other way. It can be seen that they seem more serious and concentration to participate in class because they want to be able to have better progress listening skill.

There are some recommended activities that can be done by the lecturer and students in conducting listening activities. It is hoped that it will be useful to improve their motivation as follows:

- a) Encourage the students to listen to English Pop Songs
The lectures can find cassettes/CDs which have the lyrics enclosed then ask the students to write a summary and test the students' listening by comparing the original lyrics with their summary.
- b) Encourage the students to listening to the English news
The lectures may also ask the students to videotape some English TV news reports by reading a newspaper in English and discuss the latest news with friends.
- c) Encourage the students to see the original editions of the western films.
The final purpose for English teaching is communication. So it is important for the students to understand the words given by the people in the western countries when they are in their lives and work. At this point, the original editions of the western films will help them.

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