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IMPROVING STUDENTS' LISTENING COMPREHENSION BY TEACHING CONNECTED SPEECH

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ABSTRACT

This present research was conducted in order to find out the improvement in students' listening comprehension and to figure out whether students' interest in listening class increases after being taught the aspects of connected speech. This research used a quantitative method with pre-experimental design, namely pre-test post-test involving only the experiment group. The population of this research was all the students of the eleventh-grade who are studying at MAS Darul Ihsan which amount to 184 students. In addition, the sample of this research was 30 students of class XI F that was chosen using purposive sampling. Moreover, this research used pre-test and post-test as well as questionnaires as data collection instruments. The research found that teaching connected speech in the listening classroom improved students' listening comprehension. This was indicated by the comparison of *t*-score which is higher than *t*-table, (3.61 > 2.04). Therefore, the alternative hypothesis (Ha) was accepted and the null hypothesis (Ho) was rejected. Furthermore, the result of students' response sheets indicated that students have positive perception toward the teaching connected speech and it can increase their interest in learning listening.

Keywords: *Listening; connected speech; improve; comprehension*

INTRODUCTION

Due to the fact that listening is a receptive skill, it is considered unimportant for many courses and most of the teachers do not pay attention to this skill since it is assumed easier than other skills (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). Consequently, many students have a variety of problems in listening comprehension. A number of researches carried out on students' obstacles in listening (e.g., Campbell, Meinardi, Richardson, & Macdonnell, 2007; Ahmadian & Matour, 2014) have pointed out that the obstacles faced by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in listening are understanding and recognizing the words, understanding rapid speech and typical native speaker inclines to be fast in delivering speech including connected speech features like elision, assimilation, weak form, construction, and intrusion. Particularly, it is hard to understand what the speakers said because they will connect one word/phrase to another in which the sounds will disappear or be changed by the surrounding sounds and sometimes they speak in chunks.

Based on the issue mentioned above, students should bear in mind that the typical native English speaker usually tends to speak quickly and connects one word to another. Moreover, in the use of real language, the sentences contain very complicated procedures that produce considerable phonological changes which are called the aspects of connected speech. Those aspects are such as contraction, intrusion, elision, assimilation, and weak forms (Ur, 1984). Unfortunately, the aspects of connected speech are not really familiar to students since they were never taught about it by the teacher. Therefore, it is important to introduce and teach connected speech or reduced forms to the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. It is because many studies showed that teaching connected speech can help students understand the speech with fast delivery (e.g., Brown & Hilferty, 2006; Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin, 1996; Matsuzawa, 2006) as cited in Ashtiani and Zafarghandi, 2015).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Listening Comprehension

According to Floyed (1985, as cited in Bozorgian, 2012, p. 658) listening is "a process entailing hearing, attending to, understanding, evaluating and

responding to the spoken message". In addition, listening requires a lot of concentration in order to gain information from the speaker. While the listener needs a deep understanding to comprehend the meaning of the information conveyed by the speaker. Similarly, Purdy (1997, as cited in Gilakjani and Sabouri, 2016) states listening is the process of receiving what the speaker says, creating the meaning of what the listeners hear, discussing and answering to spoken or nonverbal messages. It means that someone should listen carefully to get the information of what is being spoken and responding to the oral message.

Moreover, the main purpose of listening is not only receiving or getting the information from the speaker but also to understand the meaning of what is conveyed by the speaker to the listeners. Listening comprehension is where the listeners try to build a meaning of the information that they had listened from the listening source (Goss, 1982, as cited in Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). This statement is supported also by Brown and Yule (1997, as cited in Rahayuningsih, 2010) that the activity of paying attention and trying to obtain the meaning of something that we hear is called listening.

After noticing some definitions above, it can be concluded that listening comprehension is the activity to interpret the meaning of the spoken message in order to get the information from the speaker. Then, the listener gives the feedback or response to the speaker.

Connected Speech

Connected speech "consists of a flow of sound which are modified by a system of simplifications through which phonemes are connected, grouped and modified" (Underhill, 2005, p. 58). The simplification is the process that unconsciously happens for the first language speaker (native speaker) and most of them are often unaware of this process as they practice it. In addition, English native speakers specifically do not choose and pick their words but connect them together in the sound stream. This allows them to speak more rapidly and fluently. Brown and Kondo-Brown (2006, as cited in Ahmadian & Matour, 2014, p. 229) also mention that connected speech is formed of the real spoken English that happens unconsciously to native in all level of speech from ordinary level to even very formal

level. A natural native speaker's speech which occurs with mostly rapid and continuous with frequent linking, sound changes, or a reduction in word boundaries, which can cause trouble when non-native speakers listen to it.

Thus, from all definitions that have been mentioned above, it can be concluded that connected speech is a process of a word that is concatenated with other words in one breath. It occurs unconsciously to a native speaker and they are often unaware of these processes as they use it whether it is in the formal context or even informal context, fast or slow.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The researcher used a quantitative research design in order to find the data and the results of the tests in which the researcher has done in the field. The design of this research was pre-experimental research design, namely the one group pretest-posttest model design. The procedure design of pre-experimental research was that the sample was given the pre-test at the beginning of the meeting and post-test at the end of the meeting. In short, the success of the treatment was coursed after comparing the pre-test to the post-test result. Then, the researcher distributed the questionnaires after giving the post-test in order to get the additional information to fulfill the research.

Participants and Setting

This research was conducted on students of the eleventh-grade who study at private Islamic senior high school (MAS) Darul Ihsan. It is because Darul Ihsan is a boarding school providing their students with listening and speaking classroom which differs from other schools that only have an English classroom in general. Moreover, the sample of this research was 30 students of class XI.F that was chosen purposively since the class had a lot of problems in listening classroom, as stated by an English teacher of Darul Ihsan.

Data Collection and Procedure

There were some techniques of data collection used in this research:

a. Experimental Teaching

The researcher conducted experimental teaching before applying posttest for fourth meeting. In the first meeting, the students were given the pre-test before the treatment in order to measure their understanding of listening comprehension. In the second and third meeting, the researcher did the treatment in which the researcher taught the students about connected speech aspects and gave them some exercises. In the last meeting, the researcher gave them the post-test in order to see their improvement in listening comprehension after being taught connected speech. At the end of the class, the questionnaires were distributed.

b. Tests

Tests in this research were given to see the extent of their success in listening comprehension before and after the treatment. The tests included two phases; the test of listening comprehension and dictation test. Both of the tests consisted of 10 questions for each comprehension and dictation test that would be used in pre-test and post-test. In the dictation test, the students were asked to listen to audio and asked to fill in the blank with what they heard. Furthermore, the instrument used to test students' comprehension and dictation test was extracted from Developing Tactics for Listening book 3rd edition by Jack C. Richards (2010) published by Oxford University Press.

c. Questionnaires

The researcher distributed the questionnaires in order to get the additional information from students about connected speech to see whether students' interest in listening increases after being taught connected speech. The questionnaires were distributed after both experimental teaching and test completed. The questionnaires of this research consisted of 7 close-ended questions.

RESULTS

The following tables show results of the pre-test and post-test:

Result of the Pre-Test

Table 1
The Frequency Distribution of Students' Pre-test Score

No	Students' Score	f_1	X_1	X_1-X	$(X_1 - X)^2$	$f_1 (X_1 - X)^2$
1	23-30	10	26.5	-13.03	169.78	1697.81
2	31-38	3	34.5	-5.03	25.30	75.90
3	39-46	5	42.5	2.97	8.82	44.10
4	47-54	3	50.5	10.97	120.34	361.02
5	55-62	5	58.5	18.97	359.86	1799.30
6	63-70	4	66.5	26.97	727.38	2909.52
	Total Score	30	279	-	-	6887.67

After calculating the mean of the pre-test, it showed that the mean score of the pre-test was 39.53. Then the researcher used a standard deviation to calculate how individual measurements should be expected to deviate from the mean on average. It can be found that the standard deviation of the pre-test was 15.41.

Result of the Post-Test

Table 2

The Frequency Distribution of Students' Post-test Score

No	Students' Score	f_1	X_1	X_1-X	$(X_1 - X)^2$	$f_1 (X_1 - X)^2$
1	32-40	3	36	-17.9	320.41	961.23
2	41-49	7	45	-8.9	79.21	554.47
3	50-58	8	54	0.1	0.01	0.08
4	59-67	4	63	9.1	82.81	331.24
5	68-76	2	72	18.1	327.61	655.22
6	77-85	6	81	27.1	734.41	4406.46
	Total Score	30	351	-	-	6908.70

After calculating the mean of the post-test, it showed that the mean score of the post-test was 53.90. Then the researcher used a standard deviation to calculate how individual measurements should be expected to deviate from the mean on average. It can be found that the standard deviation of the post-test was 15.43.

T-score Calculation

T-score was used in order to find out the significant differences between pre-test and post-test.

$$t - score = \frac{53.90 - 39.53}{\sqrt{(\frac{238.23}{30}) + (\frac{237.50}{30})}}$$

$$t - score = \frac{14,37}{\sqrt{7.94 + 7.91}}$$

$$t - score = \frac{14.37}{\sqrt{15.85}}$$

$$t - score = \frac{14.37}{3.98} = 3.61$$

Hypotheses Testing

The researcher used the result of the *t*-score analysis in testing the hypotheses. Based on the *t*-table at the level of significance α 0.05 (5%), according to Bungin (2005, p. 185) says that to measure the result of the hypothesis, it can be used this criteria; if t-test > *t*-table, it means that the alternative hypothesis (Ha) is accepted and null hypothesis (Ho) is rejected.

After *t*-score examined the hypothesis, the result of *t*-score was 3.61. Therefore, the next step was to interpret the *t*-score by determining the *degree of freedom* (df). *Df = N-1* = 30-1 = 29. As the result, the researcher compared *t*-score to significant *t*-table with *df* 29 with value $t_{t.sv}$5%= 2.04 and $t_{t.sv}$1%= 2.76 . So, *t*-score was bigger than t-table.

$$2.04 < 3.61 > 2.76$$

Furthermore, in referring to the criteria above, because of *t*-score was higher than *t*-table, it could be concluded that the alternative hypothesis (*Ha*) was accepted and the null hypothesis (Ho) was rejected.

The results of the questionnaires

Table 3

The Results of Questionnaires (close-ended questions)

No	Statement	Frequency (F)				Percentage (%)			
		SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SDS (1)	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SDS (1)
1.	I like connected speech that is used by the teacher in learning listening	15	15	-	-	50	50	-	-

2.	I am excited in learning listening by using a connected speech	17	12	1	-	56.7	40	3.3	-
3.	Learning listening with connected speech is not boring	7	23	-	-	23.3	76.7	-	-
4.	Learning listening with connected speech makes the learning atmosphere active and enjoyable	11	19	-	-	36.7	63.3	-	-
5.	I feel connected speech can help me overcome various problems in listening	15	15	-	-	50	50	-	-
6.	The use of connected speech is very influential and helps me in understanding various conversations in English	16	12	2	-	53.3	40	6.7	-
7.	I enjoy learning listening right after I studied connected speech	14	15	1	-	46.7	50	3.3	-
	Total	95	111	4	-	317	370	13.3	-
	Equation Degree	13.6	15.86	0.571	-	45.2	52.9	1.9	-
	Total %					98.1 %		1.9 %	

From the table above, it was found that the percentage of the positive answers (strongly agree and agree) were 98.1%, while in the negative answers (disagree and strongly disagree) were 1.9%, it means that the positive answers were higher than the negative answers.

DISCUSSION

There are two points of discussion in this study to answer the research questions. Firstly, it finds out the students' improvement in listening comprehension after connected speech being taught to them. Based on the result shown, the comparison between the mean score of the pre-test and the post-test was different; 39.53 < 53.90. Moreover, the t-score also showed that there was a significant improvement of students' listening comprehension score after being taught connected speech. As it was proven by the result of hypotheses testing: t-test > t-table or 3.61 > 2.04. It means the result of this research was higher than t-table that caused the H_o to be rejected and H_a to be accepted. Similarly, the research that was conducted by Mahmood et al. (2012) found that the teaching connected speech aspects in listening improved students' listening comprehension. This was

also proven by the mean score of the experimental group which was 32.75 and control group which was 25.85. In addition, other research (e.g. Baghrahi et al., 2014; Khaghaninezhad and Jafarzadeh, 2014) also confirmed that teaching connected speech aspects significantly raised the students' awareness of those aspects in listening.

Unfortunately, although teaching connected speech significantly improved students' listening comprehension but most of their scores were still under the school's minimum criteria (KKM). This might be due to several external factors during the process of data collection, such as getting ill, having dormitory picket, or going home that caused the students unable to attend the classroom during the treatment phases so they missed the lesson.

Secondly, it was figured out that the students' interest in listening increased after being taught connected speech. Based on the questionnaires, the students have had a positive view towards teaching connected speech that could increase their interest in learning listening. As seen in table 3, the percentage of their positive answers were 98.1%, while in the negative answers were only 1.9%. The result was also in line with Mahmood, et al. (2012) and Bagharni et al. (2014) who also stated that the students were more motivated, confident and participative in learning English especially in listening course after connected speech aspects being taught to them.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, teaching connected speech in the listening classroom helped the students to solve their problems in listening comprehension and it was effective in improving their listening ability as shown in the students' mean scores in both pre- and post-tests. The mean score of pre-test was 39.53 and the mean score of post-test was 53.90. Moreover, the *t*-score revealed that the score was higher than *t*-table ($3.61 > 2.04$) and thus, Ha was accepted.

In addition, the students' interest in learning listening also increased after being taught the aspects of connected speech as the majority (98.1%) of the students had positive perceptions and while only 1.9% of them were negative.

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