

STUDENTS' LINGUISTIC DIFFICULTIES IN LISTENING COURSES AT ENGLISH AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This article is part of the writer's research on students' problems pertaining to the listening skill. The research was to reveal the problems of students who had attended Listening courses at English Department of IAIN Bukittinggi. Although the students had taken three listening classes: Listening 1, Listening 2 and Listening 3, their listening skill was still low. The researcher took twenty percent of the four classes by using random sampling technique, so, total of the respondents were 25 students. The data were taken through questionnaires. The questionnaires were adapted from Hamouda's. The research was carried out by using descriptive quantitative research design. In this article the writer specifically discusses the problems pertaining to the linguistic features that the students encountered in the Listening courses. Related to the linguistic features, there are eight statements that the students need to respond. The finding reveals that around 50 percent of the students encounter problem for each statement. Therefore, the result of this study hopefully can be a consideration for the lecturers to use the appropriate teaching technique in teaching Listening courses or those who are interested in this field.

Keywords: Phrases: Linguistic Difficulties, Listening, English as Foreign Language

Introduction

Listening is one of the most important activities in human's life. People spend most of their time to listen. They do it for different purposes; they may do it for seeking news as they watch TV news, having fun as they watch film or listen to the music, attending a presentation or other intentions. When they want to comprehend the message well, they will listen attentively. Therefore, they need to be good listeners.

To be good listeners are crucial for the students who are attending listening course since it is one of the skills needed to master a language. It is much more crucial in which they are the learners of a language as foreign language. However, students in this case encounter problems in listening classes. The problems may be related to the material, the basic linguistic knowledge they have, their concentration, Psychological character, the speaker or the physical setting.

The problems in listening are also encountered by the students who attend Listening classes at English department of IAIN Bukittinggi. There are four classes of listening course therein: Listening 1, Listening 2, Listening 3 and Listening 4. Ideally they have sufficient ability in understanding a listening passage when they have taken the first three classes of the listening course but they don't. Most of them still find difficulty in understanding the passage. One of the difficulties is pertaining to the linguistic features. Due to this condition the researcher wants to discuss the students' difficulties pertaining to the linguistic features in listening classes at English Department of IAIN Bukittinggi in academic year 2017/2018.

Literature Review

People can communicate orally without literacy. Therefore, it can be said that the essence of a language is sounds. It is in line with Darcy (2015) who states that language is sounds. Therefore, it is crucial to understand what sounds are in a language if someone wants to master it.

Talking about sounds, it is related to speaking and listening skill. Listening is more complex than the other one because it involves not only perception but also attention, cognition and memory. In line with it, Guo and Wills (2006) states that ESL and EFL learners find the listening as one of the most challenging skill.

There is no doubt that Linse (2005) regards listening skill as the foundation to the development of other language skills. Even, Bingol (2017) states that it occupies the highest place in terms of ESL and EFL learning and use.

However, teaching and learning listening skill experience difficulties. Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) propose some major problems (difficulties): quality of recorded materials, cultural differences, accent, unfamiliar vocabulary and length and speed of listening. Chen (2013) discusses some problems, that is, related to unfamiliar vocabulary and phrases, rapid speech rate, speaker's accent, linking sounds between words, cannot listen to the next part when thinking about meaning, cannot segment the speech, cannot remember what was heard, cannot form a mental image from words heard, cannot figure out main ideas of the message and lack of background knowledge to understand the intended meaning.

Studies have been conducted to reveal the difficulties in listening. One of them was by Hamouda (2013) who conducted a research on listening problems encountered by Saudi students. Linguistically, the major problem was on the reduced form in which all of the respondents had problem on it; none of the respondents never had problem, 11.7 % sometimes had problem, 30 % often had problem and 58.3 % always had problem on it. It means all of the respondents had problem on it.

Kaharuddin and Nanning (2014) conducted a research about the difficulties of college students in listening comprehension where English was as a foreign language. The difficulties were categorized into several categories: information processing, speakers' language content, students' English proficiency, habitual, distraction and misinterpretation. The finding shows that the most potential one was related to the speakers' language content – speakers' speed – which was 95.7 % of the total frequency.

In line with Hamouda, Chen (2013) also conducted a research about listening problems in EFL Listeners. This research was to raise students' awareness of their listening problems and strategy use so as to guide them to employ effective strategies for listening tasks and in turn to empower them to take charge of their own learning about EFL listening when they leave the EFL classroom. The finding reveals that the strategy instruction positively empowered students with problem-solving abilities.

Methodology

This research was a descriptive quantitative one. A descriptive study determines and describes the way things are (Gay and Airasian, 2000). Meanwhile, a quantitative research is defined by Gay, et. al. (2012) as the collection and analysis of numerical data to describe, explain, predict, or control phenomena of interest.

The research was aimed at identifying the problems the students encounter in comprehending the spoken text in listening classes: Listening 1, Listening 2 and Listening 3. The population of this research was all of the students who had taken three listening classes- Listening 1, Listening 2 and Listening 3- at English Department of IAIN Bukittinggi. Sample of the population was taken randomly by taking fifteen percent (15%) each class so that there were 25 students as the sample of this research.

This research used questionnaire as the instrument to get the data. The questionnaire was adapted from Hamoudas' (2013). There were eight statements needed to be responded by the students about the difficulties they encountered in comprehending the spoken text in the listening classes that they had already taken. Thus, there were three groups of data that is data of Listening 1, Listening 2 and Listening 3; the response was one of the four options: *Never* (N), *Seldom* (S), *Often* (O) and *Always* (A). In this research, only options *often* and *always* which were regarded as problems. The data gotten were tallied and calculated in the form of percentage.

Finding and Discussion

Finding

After conducting the calculation to the data, it was *found* that around fifty percent of the students experienced difficulty for each statement. The statements are related to colloquial language and slang, reduced forms, pronunciation, intonation of the speaker, signals which indicate speaker's moving from one point to another, unknown word, inference and sequence of the spoken text. Each is further discussed as follows.

Discussion

There were eight statements that the respondents responded. The first statement was *I find it surprising and difficult to deal with colloquial language and slang*. The second one is *I find it difficult to understand reduced forms*. The third one is *I find the pronunciation familiar but cannot recognize the words*. The next one is *I do not pay attention to intonation of the speaker*. The fifth is *I find it difficult to recognize the signals which indicate that the speaker is moving from one point to another*. The sixth is *when encountering an unknown word I stop listening and think about the meaning of the word*. The next one is *I find it difficult to*

infer the meaning of an unknown word while listening. And the last one is *I find it difficult to follow the sequence of the spoken text when the sentences are too long and complex.* The result of the data tabulation is as follows.

Difficulties dealing with colloquial language and slang.

For the first statement which is *I find it surprising and difficult to deal with colloquial language and slang*, it was found that on Listening 1: one respondent chose option *never*, ten respondents chose option *sometimes*, five respondents chose option *often* and nine respondents chose option *always*; on Listening 2: one respondent chose option *never*, five respondents chose option *sometimes*, seven respondents chose option *often* and seven respondents chose option *always*; on the Listening 3: one respondent chose option *never*, seven respondents chose option *sometimes*, eight respondents chose option *often* and nine respondents chose option *always*. It means 4 %, 40 %, 20 % and 36 % of the respondents chose successively chose options never, sometimes, often and always on the Listening 1; 4 %, 20 %, 28 % and 28 % of the respondents chose successively chose options never, sometimes, often and always on the Listening 2; 4 %, 28 %, 32 % and 36 % of the respondents chose successively options never, sometimes, often and always on the Listening 3. It can be seen on table 1.

Table 1. Difficulties dealing with colloquial language and slang.

| Statement | Course | N | S | O | A |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|----|-----|-----|-----|
| I find it surprising and difficult to deal with colloquial language and slang | Listening 1 | 4% | 40% | 20% | 36% |
| | Listening 2 | 4% | 20% | 28% | 28% |
| | Listening 3 | 4% | 28% | 32% | 36% |

Difficulties dealing with reduced forms.

For the second statement which is *I find it difficult to understand reduced forms*, it was found that on Listening 1: one respondent chose option *never*, eleven respondents chose option *sometimes*, seven respondents chose option *often* and six respondents chose option *always*; on Listening 2: one respondent chose option *never*, eleven respondents chose option *sometimes*, eight respondents chose option *often* and five respondents chose option *always*; on the Listening 3: none respondent chose option *never*, eight respondents chose option *sometimes*, eleven respondents chose option *often* and six respondents chose option *always*. Thus, on percentage, there was 4 %, 44 %, 28 % and 24 % of the respondents chose successively options never, sometimes, often and always on the Listening 1; 4 %, 44 %, 32 % and 20 % of the respondents chose successively chose options never, sometimes, often and always on the Listening 2; 0 %, 32 %, 44 % and 24 % of the respondents chose successively options never, sometimes, often and always on the Listening 3. It can be seen on table 2.

Table 2. Difficulties dealing with reduced forms.

| Statement | Course | N | S | O | A |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------|----|-----|-----|-----|
| I find it difficult to understand reduced forms | Listening 1 | 4% | 44% | 28% | 24% |
| | Listening 2 | 4% | 44% | 32% | 20% |
| | Listening 3 | 0% | 32% | 44% | 24% |

Difficulties dealing with words recognition.

For the third statement which is *I find the pronunciation familiar but cannot recognize the words*, it was found that on Listening 1: three respondents chose option *never*, six respondents chose option *sometimes*, nine respondents chose option *often* and five respondents chose option *always*; on Listening 2: two respondents chose option *never*, five respondents chose option *sometimes*, thirteen respondents chose option *often* and three respondents chose option *always*; on the Listening 3: one respondent chose option *never*, eight respondents chose option *sometimes*, eleven respondents chose option *often* and three respondents chose option *always*. Thus, there was 12 %, 24 %, 36 % and 20 % of the respondents chose successively options never, sometimes, often and always on the Listening 1; 8 %, 20 %, 52 % and 12 % of the respondents chose successively chose options never, sometimes, often and always on the Listening 2; 4 %,

32 %, 44 % and 12 % of the respondents chose successively options never, sometimes, often and always on the Listening 3. It can be seen on table 3.

Table 3. Difficulties dealing with words recognition.

| Statement | Course | N | S | O | A |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| I find the pronunciation familiar but cannot recognize the words | Listening 1 | 12% | 24% | 36% | 20% |
| | Listening 2 | 8% | 20% | 52% | 12% |
| | Listening 3 | 4% | 32% | 44% | 12% |

Difficulties dealing with attention to intonation of the speaker.

For the fourth statement which is *I do not pay attention to intonation of the speaker*, it was found that on Listening 1: three respondents chose option *never*, thirteen respondents chose option *sometimes*, seven respondents chose option *often* and two respondents chose option *always*; on Listening 2: two respondents chose option *never*, fourteen respondents chose option *sometimes*, seven respondents chose option *often* and two respondents chose option *always*; on the Listening 3: two respondents chose option *never*, sixteen respondents chose option *sometimes*, four respondents chose option *often* and three respondents chose option *always*. Therefore, there was 12 %, 52 %, 28 % and 8 % of the respondents chose successively options never, sometimes, often and always on the Listening 1; 8 %, 56 %, 28 % and 8 % of the respondents chose successively chose options never, sometimes, often and always on the Listening 2; 8 %, 64 %, 16 % and 12 % of the respondents chose successively options never, sometimes, often and always on the Listening 3. It can be seen on table 4.

Table 4. Difficulties dealing with attention to intonation of the speaker.

| Statement | Course | N | S | O | A |
|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| I do not pay attention to intonation of the speaker | Listening 1 | 12% | 52% | 28% | 8% |
| | Listening 2 | 8% | 56% | 28% | 8% |
| | Listening 3 | 8% | 64% | 16% | 12% |

Difficulties dealing with signals indicating speaker's movement from one point to another.

For the fifth statement which is *I find it difficult to recognize the signals which indicate that the speaker is moving from one point to another*, it was found that on Listening 1: two respondents chose option *never*, nine respondents chose option *sometimes*, eleven respondents chose option *often* and three respondents chose option *always*; on Listening 2: one respondent chose option *never*, thirteen respondents chose option *sometimes*, nine respondents chose option *often* and two respondents chose option *always*; on the Listening 3: none respondent chose option *never*, ten respondents chose option *sometimes*, eleven respondents chose option *often* and four respondents chose option *always*. Thus, there was 8 %, 36 %, 44 % and 12 % of the respondents chose successively options never, sometimes, often and always on the Listening 1; 4 %, 52 %, 36 % and 8 % of the respondents chose successively chose options never, sometimes, often and always on the Listening 2; 0 %, 40 %, 44 % and 16 % of the respondents chose successively options never, sometimes, often and always on the Listening 3. It is seen on table 5.

Table 5. Difficulties dealing with signals indicating speaker's movement from one point to another.

| Statement | Course | N | S | O | A |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| I find it difficult to recognize the signals which indicate that the speaker is moving from one point to another | Listening 1 | 8% | 36% | 44% | 12% |
| | Listening 2 | 4% | 52% | 36% | 8% |
| | Listening 3 | 0% | 40% | 44% | 16% |

Difficulties dealing with unknown word that cause stop listening.

For the sixth statement which is *when encountering an unknown word I stop listening and think about the meaning of the word*, it was found that on Listening 1: four respondents chose option *never*, seven respondents chose option *sometimes*, ten respondents chose option *often* and four respondents chose option *always*; on Listening 2: three respondents chose option *never*, eight respondents chose option *sometimes*, nine respondents chose option *often* and five respondents chose option *always*; on the Listening 3: four respondents chose option *never*, three respondents chose option *sometimes*, twelve respondents chose option *often* and six respondents chose option *always*. Thus, there was 16 %, 28 %, 40 % and 16 % of the respondents chose successively options never, sometimes, often and always on the Listening 1; 12 %, 32 %, 36 % and 20 % of the respondents chose successively chose options never, sometimes, often and always on the Listening 2; 16 %, 12 %, 48 % and 24 % of the respondents chose successively options never, sometimes, often and always on the Listening 3. It can be seen on table 6.

Table 6. Difficulties dealing with unknown word that cause stop listening.

| Statement | Course | N | S | O | A |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| when encountering an unknown word I stop listening and think about the meaning of the word | Listening 1 | 16% | 28% | 40% | 16% |
| | Listening 2 | 12% | 32% | 36% | 20% |
| | Listening 3 | 16% | 12% | 48% | 24% |

Difficulties dealing with inferring the meaning of an unknown word.

For the seventh statement which is *I find it difficult to infer the meaning of an unknown word while listening*, it was found that on Listening 1: one respondent chose option *never*, fourteen respondents chose option *sometimes*, five respondents chose option *often* and five respondents chose option *always*; on Listening 2: none respondent chose option *never*, twelve respondents chose option *sometimes*, nine respondents chose option *often* and four respondents chose option *always*; on the Listening 3: none respondent chose option *never*, ten respondents chose option *sometimes*, twelve respondents chose option *often* and three respondents chose option *always*. Therefore, there was 4 %, 56 %, 20 % and 20 % of the respondents chose successively options never, sometimes, often and always on the Listening 1; 0 %, 48 %, 36 % and 16 % of the respondents chose successively chose options never, sometimes, often and always on the Listening 2; 0 %, 40 %, 48 % and 12 % of the respondents chose successively options never, sometimes, often and always on the Listening 3. It can be seen on table 7.

Table 7. Difficulties dealing with inferring the meaning of an unknown word.

| Statement | Course | N | S | O | A |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|----|-----|-----|-----|
| I find it difficult to infer the meaning of an unknown word while listening | Listening 1 | 4% | 56% | 20% | 20% |
| | Listening 2 | 0% | 48% | 36% | 16% |
| | Listening 3 | 0% | 40% | 48% | 12% |

Difficulties dealing with sequence of a long and complex spoken text.

For the eighth statement which is *I find it difficult to follow the sequence of the spoken text when the sentences are too long and complex*, it was found that on Listening 1: none respondent chose option *never*, eleven respondents chose option *sometimes*, eleven respondents chose option *often* and three respondents chose option *always*; on Listening 2: none respondent chose option *never*, nine respondents chose option *sometimes*, eleven respondents chose option *often* and four respondents chose option *always*; on the Listening 3: none respondent chose option *never*, five respondents chose option *sometimes*, thirteen respondents chose option *often* and seven respondents chose option *always*. Thus, there was 0 %, 44 %, 44 % and 12 % of the respondents chose successively options never, sometimes, often and always on the Listening 1; 0 %, 36 %, 44 % and 16 % of the respondents chose successively chose options never, sometimes, often and always on the Listening 2; 0 %, 20 %, 52 % and 28 % of the respondents chose successively options never, sometimes, often and always on the Listening 3. The percentage can be seen on table 8.

Table 8. Difficulties dealing with sequence of a long and complex spoken text.

| Statement | Course | N | S | O | A |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| I find it difficult to follow the sequence of the spoken text when the sentences are too long and complex, | Listening 1 | 0% | 44% | 44% | 12% |
| | Listening 2 | 0% | 36% | 44% | 16% |
| | Listening 3 | 0% | 20% | 52% | 28% |

In this research only the options *often* and *always* which were regarded as problems. It means that options *never* and *sometimes* were not regarded as problems. Therefore, to get the percentage of the problem, the option *often* was added by the option *always*, then, it was divided by 2. Base on the data as presented above, the percentage of students who encountered problem dealing with linguistic difficulties is as follows. First, students who encountered problem pertaining to *colloquial language and slang* was 56 %, 56 % and 68 % successively for Listening 1, Listening 2 and Listening3. Thus, Overall percentage of the respondents who encountered problem deal with *colloquial language and slang* was 60 %. Second, the percentage of the students who encountered problem deal with reduced forms was 52 % on Listening 1, 52 % on Listening 2 and 68 % on Listening 3. Thus, overall percentage of the students who encountered problem deal with reduced forms was 57.3 %. Third, the percentage of the students who encountered problem deal with recognition of the words was 56 %, 64 % and 56 % successively for Listening 1, Listening 2 and Listening3. Therefore, the overall percentage of the respondents who encountered problem deal with *the recognition of the words* was 58.7 %. Fourth, the percentage of the students who encountered problem on not paying attention to the intonation of the speaker was 36 % on Listening 1, 36 % on the Listening 2 and 28 % on the Listening 3. Thus, the overall percentage of the students who experienced problem on the intonation of the speaker was 33.3 %. Fifth, the percentage of the students who encountered problem deal with recognition of the signals which indicate speaker's movement from one point to another was 56 % on Listening 1, 44 % on Listening 2 and 60 % on Listening 3. Thus, overall percentage of the students who encountered problem on speaker's movement from one point to another was 53.3 %. Sixth, the percentage of the students who encountered problem deal with the unknown word was 60 %, 56 % and 72 % successively for Listening 1, Listening 2 and Listening3. Therefore, the overall percentage of the respondents who encountered problem deal with the unknown word was 62.6 %. Seventh, the percentage of the students who encountered problem deal with inference of meaning was 40 % on Listening 1, 52 % on Listening 2 and 60 % on Listening 3. Thus, overall percentage of the students who encountered problem on inference was 50.6 %. At last, the percentage of the students who encountered problem on the sequence of the long and complex text was 56 % on Listening 1, 60 % on the Listening 2 and 80 % on the Listening 3. Thus, the overall percentage of the students who experienced problem on the sequence of the long and complex text was 65.3 %. To make it simple, it is put on table 9.

Table 9. Students' overall linguistic difficulties.

| Statement | Never and Sometimes (%) | Often and Always (%) |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| I find it surprising and difficult to deal with colloquial language and slang | 33.33 | 60 |
| I find it difficult to understand reduced forms | 42.66 | 57.3 |
| I find the pronunciation familiar but cannot recognize the words | 33.33 | 58.7 |
| I do not pay attention to intonation of the speaker | 66.66 | 33.3 |
| I find it difficult to recognize the signals which indicate that the speaker is moving from one point to another | 46.66 | 53.3 |
| When encountering an unknown word, I stop listening and think about the meaning of the word | 38.66 | 62.6 |

Table 9. Cont

| | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|------|
| I find it difficult to infer the meaning of an unknown word while listening | 49.33 | 50.6 |
| I find it difficult to follow the sequence of the spoken text when the sentences are too long and complex | 33.33 | 65.3 |

From the table above, it can be seen that for option often and always almost all of the items are above fifty percent (50%); there is only one item which is under fifty percent. On the other hand, for option never and sometimes almost all of the items are below fifty percent; there is only one item which is above fifty percent. Meanwhile, the highest percentage for option often and always is the pertaining to the sequence of the long and complex spoken text which is 65.3 % and the lowest one is the item pertaining to the attention to the intonation of the speaker which is 33.3 %. The most difficulty is pertaining to the sequence of the long and complex spoken text.

Conclusion And Suggestion

Base on the data analysis to the questionnaire which had been given to the respondents of the research pertaining to the linguistic difficulties encountered by the students who had taken three listening classes at English Department of IAIN Bukittinggi: Listening 1, Listening 2 and Listening 3 in academic year 2017/2018, it was found that seven out of eight items of the linguistic difficulties were over fifty percent. It means that there is only one item which is not difficult for the students. Therefore, it can be concluded that most students found difficulties in the listening classes: Listening 1, Listening 2 and Listening 3 at English Department of IAIN Bukittinggi in academic year 2017/2018.

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