



The Difficulties in Listening Comprehension of English Majored Freshmen at Tay Do University

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of the proposal “*The difficulties in listening comprehension of English majored freshmen at Tay Do University*” is to help students understand that: Listening is a necessary skill in learning English and finding the difficulties that students meet when they learn listening comprehension as the problem about (vocabulary, grammar, speed, and pronunciation) in listening comprehension English majored freshmen at Tay Do University encounter. The participants of this research are 130 students of class Bachelor of English 14A, 14B, 14C course 2020-2024. The questionnaire and paper interview are two main instruments of this study. The expected outcomes of this research proposal will help students solve their difficulties in listening, improve their listening comprehension abilities and develop effective listening strategies.

Keywords:

Difficulties; listening comprehension, English majored freshmen, university.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the rationale (1), the significance (2) and the organization (3) of the thesis are mentioned.

1.1 Rationale

Nowadays, English has become very important with more than one million others around the world understand and speak English. Furthermore, it is considered as an international language used to communicate among many countries in the world and with over a quarter of the world's population use this language (according to Wikipedia). In addition to connecting with many other countries to exchange information, goods and trade, etc., English can be used as a global language.

At present, there are many foreign investors who live and work in Vietnam with many different fields, knowing English is a great advantage to bring a good job and high salary. Moreover, when people intend to travel, work abroad, study abroad or marry a foreigner, so that knowing English is very important and necessary. It helps them adapt to new cultures, new customs especially they can understand and communicate with the people living there. As a result, English currently becomes one of the most popular languages in the world and that is the reason why more and more people choose to learn it.

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People use English for different purposes such as entertaining, learning, gathering necessary information, especially communication. Because everyone learns a new language that is not their mother tongue, they often have difficulty with skills such as, listening, speaking, reading, writing, etc. In which, listening comprehension is the most difficult skill. In short, “*listening skills are the building blocks of a language*” (Hossein Bozorgian, 2014).

In recent decades, listening comprehension skills have increasingly attracted the attention of researcher in teaching, learning foreign languages in general and learning English as a foreign language in particular. “*Listening skill is probably the most important language skill because people spend 60% of their time listening*” (Rubin & Thomson, (1996)). Typically, English majored freshmen at Tay Do University get many problems in studying listening subject. In listening skill, students often translate all words they hear into mother tongue – Vietnamese and then they understand or listen to word-by-word. Lack of vocabulary makes students unfocused on their lessons while listening because of finding the meaning of words. In addition, students do not recognize their grammatical errors and do not know the grammar of phrases. Moreover, students learn to pronounce incorrectly, they will not recognize words and especially they are not aware of elision of native speaker. As a result, these above bring students difficulties in listening comprehension. In general, the problems they encounter that related to linguistics (including vocabulary, grammar, speed, and pronunciation) and background knowledge.

To investigate this point deeply, the researcher conducted the research *“The difficulties in listening comprehension of English majored freshmen at Tay Do University”* with hope that freshmen of English major can realize their difficulties in listening comprehension, overcome it and improve their listening comprehension.

1.2 The significance of study

This research is done to find out the difficulties in listening comprehension of English majored freshmen at Tay Do University. Moreover, the expected outcomes of the study are to give students some advantages and improve their learning in listening comprehension. Hence, students will have much more motivation in studying listening and get excited and overcome all difficulties to improve their listening comprehension.

1.3 The organization of study

The research consists of five chapters

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Literature review

Chapter 3: Research Aim-Research question – Hypothesis

Chapter 4: Research methodology

Chapter 5: Expected outcome

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 2 presents definitions of listening, its importance, the difficulties of listening (vocabulary, grammar, speech, pronunciation) and previous studies related to extensive listening.

2.1 The definitions of listening

There are many definitions of listening by several linguistics scholars. Most of them all have something in commons. But recently, there have been some other researchers who come up with new concept of listening. Here are some definitions.

“Listening is an active and purposeful skill, listening to people not only captures what they are listening to but also links them to their experienced information” (Helgesen, 2003). Meanwhile, Howatt and Dankin (1974) stated that *“listening is the ability to identify and understand what others say”*. This includes the ability to understand the speaker's accent, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary and grasp his/her meaning. In fact, Chastain (1971) reported that *“listening comprehension is the ability to understand what the speaker says at normal speed in unstructured situations”*. Later, Friedman (2004) added that *“listening is an art, not a science. It has to do with mentally absorbing what is being spoken. It is not about hearing. It is deeper. Great listeners begin by developing their listening skill”*.

Additionally, Anderson and Lynch (1988) stated that *“understanding is not merely dependent on the speaker, but the listener has a crucial role in understanding what is spoken in front of him/her”*. They comment that a listener needs to use his/her previous knowledge and relates it to the new knowledge so as to comprehend what is being spoken. Nevertheless,

Mendelsohn (1994) reported that *“listening has an importance role in communication that is to say listening takes up 40-50%; speaking, 25-30%; reading, 11-16%; and writing, about 9%”*. *Listening takes part more of daily communication time than other forms of oral communication inside and outside of classroom* (Wolvin and Coakley, 1988). Besides, Purdy (1997) supposed that *“listening is the process of receiving, making meaning from, and answering to spoken and/or nonverbal messages”*.

To sum up, listening skills are one of the four leading skills in communication, understanding the definition of listening and listening correctly way to help learns better understand the purpose, content of the story and the context of communication. It is essential for learning a new language.

2.2 The importance of listening

Rost (1994), Nunan (2002), Cohen and Macaro (2007) stated that *“more attention is directed to the importance of listening comprehension as a methodological concern in foreign language education according to the communicative and interaction-based approaches to language teaching”*. Listening is the most common communicative activity in daily life. As reported by Morley (1991) *“listening is the thing that people do most of their time. People listen more than they speak, read and write”*. Furthermore, Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) stated that *“of the total time spent on communicating, listening takes up 40-50%; speaking, 25-30%; reading, and writing, about 9%, which means that listening is crucial for communication”*. Indeed, Wolvin and Coakley (1988) concluded that, *“both in and out of the classroom, listening consumes more of daily communication time than other forms of verbal communication”*.

With this one, listening has an importance role not only in daily life but also in classroom settings. Anderson and Lynch (2003) provided that *“we only become aware of what remarkable feats of listening we achieve when we are in an unfamiliar listening environment, such as listening to a language in which we have limited proficiency”*. Most people think that being able to write and speak in a second language means that they know the language. However, if they do not have the efficient listening skills, it is not possible to communicate effectively. That is, *listening is the basic skill in language learning and over 50% of the time that students spend functioning in a foreign language will be devoted to listening* (Nunan, 1998). Rost (1994) explained the importance of listening in language classroom as follows: *“Listening is vital in the language classroom because it provides input for the learners. Without understanding input at the right level, any learning simply cannot begin”*. In reality, listening is very significant because it helps everyone build an effective relationship, exchange messages easily and understand the personality and attitudes of the other person.

In conclusion, listening comprehension skills are an important in the daily and academic contexts communication skills, if people improve this skill it will be the keyword

initially for success and it is crucial for people to sustain effective communication.

2.3 The difficulties of listening:

2.3.1 Vocabulary

Vocabulary is considered the beginning of all learning a new language; it is the most basic foundation and determines the success or failure of learners. In order to meet the needs and expand the knowledge has never stopped and the importance of vocabulary learning in English by foreign language learners is the same. According to D. A. Wilkins proposed that “*Without grammar, very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed*”. To put it simply, students with low vocabulary will have a lot of difficulties absorbing or transmitting any information and above all will have big problems when supplementing about listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

Indeed, the role vocabulary plays in second language acquisition and foreign language teaching is highly valued. It is one element that links the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. But when students communicate in a foreign language they do not have enough basic number of words and do not know how to use them in different contexts as well as for different purposes. Vocabulary is a cell that makes up a language, a raw material for speaking, furthermore, it is very important because it conveys the view, thoughts and feelings of the communicator (according to Wikipedia). Apart from that, English has a vast number of words – the biggest of any language, according to some scholars. It is particularly complex lexicon, which means that there is huge variety in how words are spelled. In particular, there are numerous instances of words meaning essentially the same thing, but with subtle differences that are often lost on those who do not speak English as their mother tongue and there are also plenty of synonyms.

Besides, English is also littered with idioms and in order to speak English like a native speaker, knowledge of idioms is essential. But students have very limited idioms due to not accumulating from the knowledge they have learned and refusing to explore learning from books. Wilkins, D. (1992) added that “*if foreign language learners spend most of their time studying grammar, their English will not improve much. They will see significant improvement if they learn a lot of words and phrases*”. Hence, students hear phrases such as “fat chance” adding colour to everyday language, and it is not just the phrases they need to learn, but it meanings when it is appropriate for them to use those phrases

In fact, lack of vocabulary is an obstacle for students when they listened to a speech and learn English as well.

2.3.2 Grammar

English grammar is a grammatical structure in English that indicates putting the sentence correct order, correct relationship and harmony between words, elements to create a complete sentence (from Wikipedia). In other words, when learning a new language, learning grammar well will be

an important step if the learners want to study that language well. But it is a big difficulty that wants to improve it students need a long striving process because English language learners still make many grammatical mistakes although knowing a lot of words. Also, Ngo, N. T. H. (2015) assumed that “*Student tend to inference their mother tongue structure to the structure of the foreign language*”.

Notably, the use appropriate verbs, the agreement between the subject and the verb, the proper use of articles, attention to the form of the word, the position of the adverb in the sentence, confusion with the preposition of the adjective, the use “I” and “me”, comparing adjectives, possessive errors, etc. These are some of the most common English grammatical mistakes and some of the difficulties that students often encounter when studying English grammar. For example:

2.3.2.1 The use appropriate verbs

Ex 1) I went to my friend’s house yesterday and we play football (False)

2) I went to my friend’s house yesterday and we played football (True)

2.3.2.2 The agreement between the subject and the verb

Ex 1) I lives in HaNoi (False)

2) I live in HaNoi (True)

2.3.2.3 The proper use of articles

Ex 1) I saw movie yesterday (False)

2) I saw a movie yesterday (True)

2.3.2.4 Attention to the form of the word

Ex 1) The principle of the school asked the students to keep quite (False)

2) The principal of the school asked the students to keep quite (True)

2.3.2.5 The position of the adverb in the sentence

Ex 1) My son everyday goes to school (False)

2) My son goes to school everyday (True)

2.3.2.6 Confusion with the preposition of the adjective

Ex 1) He is accused for theft (False)

2) He is accused of theft (True)

2.3.2.7 The use “I” and “me”

Ex 1) My friends and me went to Paris (False)

2) My friends and I went to Paris (True)

2.3.2.8 Comparing adjectives

Ex 1) He is more tall than me (False)

2) He is taller than me (True)

2.3.2.9 Possessive errors

Ex 1) I went to my parent’s house (False)

2) I went to my parents’ house (True)

Moreover, students who lack of knowledge in using collocations make their writing and speaking unlike native speakers. (for example, “blonde hair” no “yellow hair”, “strong wind” no “heavy wind”, “take medicine” no “drink medicine”, or “I have left my book at home” no “I have forgotten my book at home”, etc.

It is obvious that the biggest obstacle for them, but these are just of the most basic difficulties. There will be no success to come if learners do not have a self-study plan, study in groups, find useful information and lessons right now.

2.3.3 Speed

According to Underwood (1989), *speed can make listening passage difficult. If the speakers speak too fast students may have serious problems to understand words.* In this situation, listeners are not able to control the speed of speakers and this can create problems with listening comprehension. Hence, listeners want to control the speaker's speed is not easy. This affects their language learning process, making them depressed because of trying to be passive.

In addition, foreigners usually still stick their tunes with each other according to their language (native language), students do not listen to English regularly, they will be unfamiliar listening and will not keep up with the speaker's speed. *When learning a language learner will learn every word but when native speakers say they will speak like flowing water. For example, "What is your name", they will not clearly read four words but learners can only hear the words "what" and "name" (from Vnexpressnet).* In fact, that is the difference between spoken and written languages. The language is clearly written word for word, the spoken language is not. Native speakers only speak clear keywords and read through the rest of the words gently.

Subsequently, it is not easy to catch up with the speaker's speed, foreign language learners should be actively practice in a logical and methodical manner by regularly practicing and interacting and they should search and learn level documents from easy to difficult.

2.3.4 Pronunciation

Pronunciation is one of the skills that determines half the success of a language learner. Although the vocabulary and grammar are perfect, but the pronunciation is wrong, the listener does not understand it, it is like breaking half of the learning process (from Wikipedia). Indeed, in pronunciation, students face many difficulties in pronouncing English words such as about diphthongs, vowels stress, rhythm, new sounds, intonation, etc. These above difficulties make students get confused. Failure to recognize the stress of a word or in a sentence can make students unrecognized the intonation of different sentences. It will cause students not to understand and not catch what the speaker is saying.

Gilbert (1984) stated that *"sentence stress in English helps listeners distinguish which information is old information, which information is of comparative nature and vice versa"*. Later, Cauldwell, R. (2002) reported that *"Learners often make two main pronunciation mistakes that they press in the wrong place leading to unclearly understand information and they press all words in a sentence"*. Furthermore, ending sounds is the one not to miss. Lack of ending sounds is the most common mistake of Vietnamese

people when they learn English. For example, "fine, five, fight, find". Besides, in English, there are some sounds that are not available in the mother tongue, which affects the pronunciation of learners that they cannot pronounce. For example, /tʃ/ (chew, /tʃu:/, cheat /tʃi:t/), /ʃ/ (sheep, /ʃi:p/, shrink /ʃrɪŋk/), /dʒ/ (joy, /dʒɔɪ/, jam /dʒæm/). For the students who have difficulties English pronunciation probably it cannot be avoided directly. And it influences their listening skill more.

As such, students do not recognize English sounds, homophones, especially words with similar pronunciation. In which, confusion between positive and negative forms are the main reason, the failure to recognize the main information to hear is due to several characteristics of speech pronunciation such as: elision, weak form, assimilation, contraction, linking.

Moreover, the way learners speak in a different language is affected by their mother tongue that lead to difficulties in listening ability when native speakers speak. Besides, English has many similar sounds. Many students who learn English have problems pronouncing incorrect words. If they can master the differences in pronunciation between words with each other, students will improve their pronunciation as well as their listening skill.

To summarize, the pronunciation is no exception, success or failure is due to the perseverance of the learners.

2.4 Background knowledge

Background knowledge is an important part that foreign language learners should have. It is like a house that wants to build a high base must have a solid foundation. According to Brody (2001) stated that *"background knowledge includes knowledge of target culture, knowledge of currents affairs, arts, politics and literatures"*. In fact, lack of background knowledge makes students difficult to catch up when learning a new language. The brain will do a lot of things at the same time because it has to acquire new knowledge next understand and then have to stay in the brain. New knowledge will have to be memorized and saved, which leads to the brain containing too much information, students learn first to forget later, do not remember clearly learn what. Actually, Samuels (1984) said that *"if a person has mastered the skill of analyzing speech accurately and automatically, lack of basic background knowledge can cause reduced listening comprehension"*. Thus, if students have good basic knowledge, it will be very helpful in listening comprehension with many vocabulary topics and many different contexts because the listening content is often related to many fields, purposes, social conditions, etc.

In brief, background knowledge is the first factor affecting students' listening comprehension and it is the source of all success.

3. RESEARCH AIMS-RESEARCH QUESTIONS-HYPOTHESIS

This chapter states the research aims (1), research question (2) and hypothesis (3).

3.1 Research aims

This research is conducted to explore the difficulties in listening comprehension of English majored freshmen at Tay Do University.

3.2 Research questions

This study aims to answer the following research question:

- 1) What are the difficulties in listening comprehension of English majored freshmen at Tay Do University?
- 2) What are some suggested ways to improve the listening skill of English majored freshmen at Tay Do University?

3.3 Hypothesis

According to the literature and the research questions, it is hypothesized that Tay Do University’s English majored freshmen might encounter some difficulties in listening comprehension such as vocabulary, grammar, speed, pronunciation, psychological factors background knowledge.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the design (1), participants (2), instruments (3) and procedure of the research (4).

4.1 Design

This research will be carried out to find out difficulties about listening comprehension of freshmen at Tay Do University. The participants are 130 English majored freshmen at Tay Do University who will be delivered questionnaires. The reliability and validity of the research results are based on the instrument. The data from the participants included closed and opened questions to collate and analyze easily. The study will be performed in 16 weeks. The paper interview is created and given to 20 students who freely answer the question mentioned on paper. The collected information of the instrument is quantitatively analyzed to show the difficulties in listening comprehension of English majored freshmen at Tay Do University.

4.2 Participants

There are 130 participants in this study who are English majored freshmen at Tay Do University. They will be selected randomly. They come from different areas, both rural and urban. They speak Vietnamese as their mother tongue and speak English as a foreign language. Most of them have the age of 20. Others are from 18 years old to 22 years old. In addition, they have been learning English for 7 years in secondary and high school. They will be given the questionnaire and the paper interview in order to get information about difficulties they have faced in learning English listening comprehension. This helps to provide reliable results and generative findings of research.

4.3 Instruments

Questionnaire

The questionnaire includes 8 questions and 16 statements and it is divided into the following groups:

- a. Question 1 to 8 – Students’ background
- b. Statement 9 to 12 – Students’ difficulties in Vocabulary
- c. Statement 13 to 16 – Students’ difficulties in Grammar
- d. Statement 17 to 20 – Students’ difficulties in Speed
- e. Statement 21 to 24 – Students’ difficulties in Pronunciation

Students show their own ideas by checking only one column for each statement according to the 5-degree scale. Paper interview consists of four questions. Those questions revolve around real life every day. Students can exchange ideas with each other to complete the questions.

4.4 Procedure

The study will be lasted 12 weeks and have 3 steps

Duration (16 weeks)	Activities in study process
Step 1: The first five weeks	+ Correcting the research title + Designing frame work of the research + Designing chapter 1, questionnaire and interview + Looking for reference.
Step 2: The next eight weeks	+ Writing chapter 1 and appendix 1 and 2 + Getting the teacher’s guidance + Editing chapter 1 and appendix 1 and 2 + Writing chapter 2 + Getting the teacher’s guidance + Editing chapter 2 + Writing chapter 3; 4
Step 3: The last three weeks	+ Writing chapter 5 + Getting the teacher’s guidance + Editing chapter 3; 4; 5 and temporary completion of the main content in the research +The teacher checks the research and proposes some advices +Editing the whole research +Completing the research.

5. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

English majored freshmen at Tay Do University face many difficulties in listening comprehension. Which relate to vocabulary, grammar, speed, pronunciation and background knowledge?

First of all, students find it is hard to know all the vocabulary that they come across in listening comprehension test. And some words have many meanings when they are used in different contexts. Moreover, poor grammar also affects a lot. Most of student cannot understand a meaning of some sentence structure in listening comprehension. There are too many long sentences with complex structures which some

students may never see or hear before lead to students feel unclear in the content. Besides, it is hard to catch the speaker's speed because when the speakers too fast, if the students do not catch up with the speed or they can only hear some of them, they will be missed the rest of the speech. It makes them cannot get the meaning of all the conversation. Furthermore, pronunciation also affects their ability to hear in a sharp way. Students cannot distinguish sounds, homophones, especially words with similar pronunciation. So they easily confuse words. On the other hand, students are easily confused between affirmative and negative forms, thus resulting in ineffective listening efforts.

Second, one of the other obstacles that cause difficulties for students in listening comprehension is background knowledge. It is hard for English majored freshmen at Tay Do University to understand special meanings of new field or different new knowledge when they do not have good background knowledge. Thus, poor background knowledge will cause the listening failure of them.

In all, doing this research, the researcher hopes to find the difficulties in listening comprehension of English majored freshmen at Tay Do University and this research can help students recognize their own shortcomings in listening comprehension process so that they can have effective learning directions.

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