

How Do Authentic Materials Improve Students' Listening Comprehension?

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Abstract: *The aims of this research are to identify whether authentic materials (AMs) can improve students' listening comprehension (LC) and to describe the classroom situation when AMs are used in teaching and learning process of LC. This is a classroom action research conducted in a university class in Indonesia which revealed that AM could improve students' LC achievement and motivated them to learn LC. They became more active and paid more attention to the lesson. In short, positive response from the students toward the teaching and learning process of LC with AM is considerably significant.*

The students' LC improvement was revealed in the test scores in which the mean scores increased from 56.67 (pre-test of Cycle 1) to 60.70 (post-test of Cycle 1). It increased again in the post-test of Cycle 2, which was 69.07. The analysis of t-test non independent scores between the pre-test and post-test 1 was 4.226 which was higher than t-table 2.779. The t-test between post-test 1 and post-test 2 was 7.0235, $\alpha = 0.05$. Therefore, there is a significant difference between the condition before treatment and after treatment. Thus, it can be concluded that using AM in teaching listening can improve students' LC.

Key Words: *listening comprehension, authentic materials, learning achievement*

Introduction

Listening skill is a receptive skill, the way in which people extract meaning from the discourse they hear which must be taught if the ability to understand the spoken form of the foreign language is not acquired naturally. In the university under investigation LC is taught as a compulsory subject. Based on the listening syllabus the students at the third semester should achieve listening comprehension at intermediate level. However, the students have difficulties to obtain this level. Their difficulties in LC are found to be caused by the use of textbook where the lecturer generally only applies the strategies provided in the books which according to Ying-hui (2006:4) actually should be adapted to the students' needs where in LC they are expected to be able to get the gist of the discourse, understand the main points and important details, and recognize the opinion and attitude of the speaker. The textbooks do not provide any visual cues to help students more aware of speaker's attitude. Furthermore, they do not provide enough pedagogical support to help students with their lack of actual linguistic knowledge. Because of

the drawback the textbooks possess, the students often show little attention to the material being presented.

So, the problem mentioned above is assumed to be caused mainly by the appropriateness of materials and the teaching techniques which do not arouse the students' interest and motivation. The techniques are said to be sometimes monotonous that result in students' boredom. Based on this class situation, a research dealing with the listening materials to improve the students' LC is carried out.

AM is selected as a solution to this problem. The common reasons of using AM in the classroom practices is that AMs afford examples of real life English where in everyday conversation there are hesitation, false starts, filled and empty pauses, etc., which characterized natural speech. This kind of materials also help learners to become familiar with the real cadences of the target language, and learners need practice in the real-life task of extracting meaning from utterances where much of the language is beyond their current state of knowledge.

Underwood (1989:100) says," AM allows the students to hear a much more real act of communication with all the interactional features which are normally not found in scripted materials". If students are given a chance to listen to a range of authentic texts, they will sample many different voices, with various accents. They will also hear people expressing things in a variety of ways, for example, anger that is expressed by shouting or by choice of words or by many interruptions. In short, learners are confronted with 'real life' experiences in which they will have to function.

AMs such as movies, songs, and chatting at a party are often entertaining. With the application of this material, students will learn the target language in unconscious process. As they become absorbed in the activity they feel free from any burden like anxiety, fear, being shy etc that they may experience. The latest news, attending a lesson and being tested orally in a subject of study are often informative that students are eager to know any information they contain. In addition, because the language is usually colloquial, the students will be encouraged to be more attentive as long as the task and the purpose of listening are explicitly stated. Furthermore, AMs are often rich in vocabulary. AMs which are carefully selected to be appropriate with learners' interest are definitely challenging and useful for them.

Moreover, students will realize that to be able to communicate they have to listen to a variety of samples, and be aware of how second language acquisition and comprehensible input plays a vital role in language learning, so, they need some degrees of exposure to AMs in order that they can apply the language in real life situations. Starting with those all, students will be interested to listen to the lesson, and with their firm intrinsic motivation the success of understanding the materials will be satisfactorily achieved. This research, therefore, questions two things: 1). Can and to what extent AMs improve students LC? 2). What happens with

classroom situation when AMs are used in improving LC? To highlight the topic under investigation, some theories presented encompass the nature of LC, listening AMs, examples of real-life listening, and characteristics of real-life listening situations.

Review of Literature

The Nature of Listening Comprehension

LC is an active and conscious process in which the listener constructs meaning by using cues from contextual information and existing knowledge, while relying upon multiple strategic resources to fulfill the task requirement (Fang, 2008). It means that the learner should be encouraged to concentrate on an active process of listening for meanings, using not only the linguistic cues but also his nonlinguistic knowledge. He should also know that not every clue is equally important to the message. Therefore, even when he misses a piece of language, he needs not worry because other clues will make him understand the message, or at least, enough of the message for his own aim. Thus, listener as an active model builder could combine the new information with his previous knowledge and experience to reach full comprehension of what had been heard. In other words, the active interpretation and integration of incoming information with prior knowledge and experience is the primary emphasis.

Listening Authentic Materials

The listening materials can be divided into two parts: graded and authentic. Because students are expected to be able to function successfully in variety of real life situation, it will be helpful to introduce AMs. It is relatively difficult for foreign learners to understand the discourse, identify the different voices and cope with frequent overlaps. However, this can be overcome with learning strategy and careful selection and editing. This being so, EFL learners will be provided with sufficient input which makes sense to examine first of all what real life listening is, and what sorts of things the listener needs to be able to do in order to comprehend satisfactorily in a variety of situations. Examples of authentic materials are film, song, radio broadcast, news, interviews, lecture and so on.

AMs, as defined in Martinez (2002:1) are materials that have been produced to fulfill some social purpose in the language community. It is material designed for native speakers of English used in the classroom in a way similar to the one it was designed for. For example, a radio news report brought into the classroom so students discuss the report on pollution in the city where learners live. While Harmer (2001:205), defines AMs as language where no concessions are made to foreign speakers. He adds that it is normal, natural language used by native – or competent – speakers of a language.

Another definition of AM is given by Miller (2003:1) that AM are any spoken texts which have not been specially prepared for language learners, and they are often delivered via technologies like radio, television/video, and the internet or CD-ROM. This kind of language is

what students encounter (or will encounter) when they come into contact with target-language speakers in real life, and precisely, because it is authentic, it is unlikely to be made simple, spoken slowly, or to be full of simplistic content.

Examples of Real-life Listening

Real-life listening situations can be gathered through making a list of as many situations where people are listening to other people in their own mother tongue. These include, of course, situations where they be doing other things beside listening-speaking, usually- but the essential point is that they need to be able to understand what is said in order to function satisfactorily in the situation. One way of doing this task is to talk ourselves through a routine day and note all the different listening experiences that occur. Some examples of real-life listening situations are interview, instructions, loudspeaker announcements, radio news, committee meeting, shopping, theatre show, telephone chat, lesson, lecture, conversation, gossip, watching television, storytelling etc (Ur, 1994:105).

Taylor and Candy (2006:18) list the types of authentic materials for listening such as: (a) Video/DVD, (b) Television, (c) Radio and recording, (d) Theatre, telephone, talks, cinema, (e) Songs, rhymes and poems. This means that actually there are a lot of things that can be explore to be effective listening materials around students themselves. This makes authentic materials more relevant to students' life since students are familiar with them.

Characteristics of Real-life Listening Situations

From the examples of real-life listening situations above, some features that seem to be common to most of the situations might be associated with the kind of language that is usually used; the kind of interaction; what the listener is doing. For example, in most situations that the speaker is improvising as he or she speaks, which results in a rather informal, disorganized kind of language; and in most situations the listener is responding to what is being said as well as listening.

a. Informal spoken discourse

In everyday life most of the spoken language people listen to is informal and spontaneous. Ur (1994:106) describes the various interesting features of informal speech such as brevity of chunks, slurred pronunciation of words, colloquial vocabulary, somewhat ungrammatical: utterances, a certain amount of 'noise', redundancy and non-repetition.

b. Listener expectation and purpose

Thing such as who is speaking or the basic topic being spoken is usually known in advance and the listener links this to his or her purpose or objective in listening. And the listener expects to hear something relevant to his or her purpose.

b. Looking as well as listening

Except listening to radio or telephone call for example, listening is normally done by having something to look at that is linked to what is being said. Listener usually looks at the speaker

his- or herself as well as looking at other visual stimuli such as a map, scene or object, or the environment in general.

c. Ongoing, purposeful listener response

As the discourse is going on, the listener is usually responding at interval. It rarely happens to listener to listen to an extended speech and responds only at the end.

e. Speaker attention

When speaking, the speaker usually pays attention to the listener and directs his or her speech to the listener takes the listener's character, intention etc. into account and often directly responds to his or her reactions. These can be done both verbally and non-verbally, by changing or adapting the discourse.

Being authentic, the speech used in such recordings is ungraded and the language is often very difficult. The shortcoming of AM in general is that when it is not chosen carefully it will be de-motivating for students as they will not understand it. Anyone who had listened to recordings of natural conversation knows that it is difficult to understand the thread of the discourse, identify the different voices and cope with frequent overlaps. To avoid failure in adapting authentic material for use in the classroom, teacher is suggested to carefully select it.

However, AMs in the semi-controlled environment of multi-media, where learners can sometimes play it again, provide them with the chance to evolve their own succession and to fashion their own communication assistants. Harmer (2001:205) also suggests that students should be let to listen to things they can understand. But, it is essential that such listening texts approximate to authentic language use. The language may be simplified but it must not be unnatural. It is stated in Harmer (2001:205) that concocted made-up language can be perfectly viable but it should be modeled on naturalistic samples. With regard to recorded materials: if the texts are carefully enough graded, prepared and administered, then the final transition from imitation of authentic speech to genuine authentic speech should take place smoothly.

Methodology

This research is undertaken as Classroom Action Research (CAR) in collaboration with two English lecturers in the second year class of the English Department in Teacher Training and Education Faculty in Indonesia. 30 students attend LC class once a week with the duration of 100 minutes each. The spiral model of action research developed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1998) in Wiraatmadja (2007:67) which consists of four essential moments namely: planning, action, observation, and reflection are applied.

The research is conducted in two cycles with each cycle consists of four steps (planning, acting, observing, and reflecting). The first cycle is designed based on the reflection of the previous condition. The data of the research are collected through some techniques including observation, interview, questionnaire, and test. The qualitative data are analyzed through the

steps consisting of data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/ verification as proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994:10-12).

Meanwhile, the quantitative data are analyzed by checking the students' answer on the written test that is carried out the implementation of cycles whether they are right or wrong, computing the students' correct answers, calculating the students' score on written test is done as follows, calculating the percentage of the correct answers of each student by using percentage correction to measure the students' listening comprehension.

Findings

The problems identified are the students' LC which is low and the students' interest and motivation which are low as well. The researcher proposed a solution to the problems that was using AMs in teaching listening. The implementation of AM in listening class consisted of two cycles; the first cycle consisted of four meetings and the second cycle consisted of two meetings. In each meeting the students' LC gradually improved and their motivation to listen was higher. Two major aspects in students' improvement are: 1) the students' competence in LC, 2) the classroom situation when the AMs are used in listening class. The result of the research can be seen in table 1.

Table 1.

The Summary of Research Findings

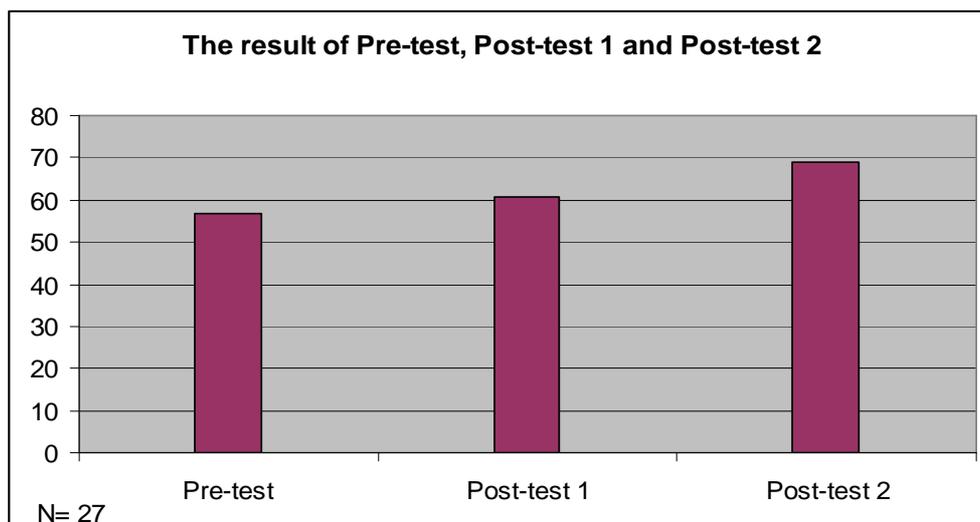
A. Students listening comprehension	
Before the implementation of authentic material	After the implementation of authentic material
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students could not identify the pragmatic units. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students can identify the pragmatic units • Students can complete the exercises quicker
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students could not connect linguistics and other cues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students can connect linguistics and other cues • Students can complete the exercises quicker
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students could not use background knowledge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students can use background knowledge • Students can complete the exercises quicker
B. Classroom situation when authentic materials were implemented	
Before the implementation of authentic	After the implementation of authentic

material	material
• Students did not show interest in the materials	• Students were interested in the materials
• Students did not show high motivation	• Students show high motivation
• Students talked about unrelated topic	• Students talk about related topic
• Students could not answer questions.	• Students can answer most questions
• Students did not participate in listening activities	• Students participate in listening activities eagerly
• Students did the tasks reluctantly	• Students do the tasks on time
• The class was not alive	• The class becomes alive

The improvement of students' LC and class situation in table 4.8 is because the students pay more attention and interested in listening materials which have connection with their lives so they are familiar with the materials.

The mean of score in pre-test is 56.67, the mean of score in cycle 1 is 60.7, and the mean of score in cycle 2 is 69.07. Based on the result of t-test for independent scores, the improvement of scores from cycle to cycle is significant. The computation of the result of Cycle 1, Cycle 2, and Cycle 3 showed that the improvement of students' score in LC was in significant condition. The t of computation in Cycle 1 was 4,226 and in Cycle 2 were 7. 0235. The improvement of the listening scores was illustrated on Graph 1.

Graph 1.



The Result of Pre-test 1, Post-test, Post-test 2

Discussion

The classroom action research done in LC class has been to determine whether AMs can bring about any improvement in classroom pedagogy. This research result has led the author to state two major points as described below:

1. AMs can improve students' LC

a. AMs improve students' competence in identifying pragmatic units (answering inference questions)

Identifying pragmatic units is one of the listening skills that needs to be developed in order that language learners can easily process the messages they hear. This skill focuses on communication, purpose, and meaning in which the goals are linguistic in nature. They are not linguistic in the traditional sense of just focusing on grammar or phonology; but by maintaining the centrality of functions like greeting people, expressing opinions, requesting information, etc. These are the discourse that happens in everyday life, the functions which are and encountered by language learners. In fact the principle of language learning is to function successfully in real communication. This is why students must be exposed to real language.

Brown (2001:244) suggests that classroom practitioners organize the classroom around those practical tasks that language users engage in "out there" in the real world. He adds that the use of authentic text help students further develop their communicative skills. Because of the features of authentic materials which provide examples communicative functions or language use, it is the right choice to use authentic materials to promote students' communicative competence. It is important, therefore, to take the opportunity wherever possible to expose students to examples of real language usage to help them become more communicatively competence.

b. AMs improve students' competence in connecting linguistic cues (answering information questions)

There is a significant improvement for students in this listening skill. This can be shown by the students' state of being active in class participation. They can answer information questions well especially after being presented authentic materials which is still on the news for example, the report dealing with crime, financial/oil crisis or film. Using film is obvious that students get a lot of environmental clues such as speakers' gestures, facial expressions, place, time, etc. which help them understand the content of the story better.

Good listeners are often indicated by their ability in answering comprehension questions. One is considered to be competent listener if he/she can understand the content or the message contained in a spoken text. To achieve this goal, language learners need to be able to master this skill, connecting linguistic and paralinguistic to non-linguistic cues which is usually measured by

their ability to answer questions about the content or information of a text. Through this skill students must be able to activate their linguistic competence supported by other cues like situation, participants, setting etc. Linguistic competence has been proved to be significant in enhancing students' LC. Mahdavy (2008:10) has proved that linguistic intelligence plays a statistically significant role in listening performance.

Kilickaya (2006:1) comments, "AMs enable learners to interact with the real language and content rather than the form. Learners feel that they are learning a target language as it is used outside the classroom." This statement shows the weakness of using AMs. This gives information that students are not exclusively taught language rules but this problem can still be easily overcome by language instructors for example by giving students some pedagogical support. She suggests, "To make my students comfortable with AMs, I do provide necessary pedagogical support for complicated sentences and unfamiliar phraseology." Despite the lack found in AMs, she suggests that learners are exposed to real language and they feel that they are learning the real language. "These are what make us excited and willing to use AMs in our classroom." Therefore Mahdavy (2008:10) also suggests, "Teachers should provide language learners with low levels of linguistic intelligence with further assistance and support and motivate them to perform more linguistic task so that they can better improve their listening skills."

c. AMs can improve students' competence in using background knowledge (guessing meaning from context)

AMs have proven to be effective in improving students' skill in guessing meaning from context as comprehension will occur when listener's background information match with new information. Using AMs in listening class has proven to support this idea. It is reasonable that students will be able to predict or guess meaning of words because students' concept about things spoken by speakers so the students have expectation to what they will hear about a topic. This will lead students to be easier to guess meanings of words.

AMs that are close to students' life will help them improve their skill of guessing meanings from context because students have the knowledge about the topic. Besides, they will find something useful as their knowledge about the topic expands by the new information that they probably have not known. Therefore the use of authentic listening materials is an important factor to take into consideration when designing LC materials.

Brown (2001:258) suggested using AMs because authentic language and real world tasks enable students to see the relevance of classroom activity to their long-term communication goal. He says, "With the use of authentic listening materials, students learn to comprehend double meaning, predict meanings, and make allowance for performance errors committed by other speakers. Thus, it is obvious that AMs improve students' competence in using background knowledge to predict meaning.

2. AMs can improve classroom situation

Authentic materials can improve students' interest and motivation in learning listening.

The research findings show that the use of AMs can improve the students' learning interest and motivation in the class. Before the application of AMs the students did not show high interest in learning listening although they realize that this subject is very important. They did not show high motivation to learn listening. In addition, the class was not alive and paid little attention to the lesson. They did not participate actively in class activities, but they often talked about unrelated topic with their friend, and even not willing to do listening tasks.

The situation changed after the research, just to be the opposite. The students show their interest and motivation in learning listening, During the teaching learning process of LC using AMs students' response toward the teaching learning process appear to be different from what it was before the action research. They look so enthusiastic in doing class activities. They mostly become more serious in paying attention to the lesson. They become serious in joining the class by participating in every class activities, answering questions, talking about the topic seriously. In short, the class becomes alive.

The reason that supports the change in class situation is the change in the kind of materials. Kilickaya (2006) states, "The use of AMs stimulates and motivates learners to comprehend the content of an oral text because the practical benefits of understanding such authentic language material are obvious." Furthermore, she adds that the materials like song as an example, is relevant to students' life and area of personal interest. It creates a non-threatening environment.

3. Other Findings:

Teacher Improved on Material Selection for Listening

Other finding in this research is dealing with teacher. When the researcher implemented the AMs for listening class, she improved in many ways. First, she was better at selecting AMs since not every authentic material is suitable for students. Second, she become more familiar with them since she discussed a lot of things during the implementation of AM such as: what kinds of topic they want, what they suggest her to do when they find difficulty in understanding the lesson, whether they also practice listening to English outside the classroom, etc. She noticed her students' interest and problems in listening so that she can find a suitable way to help them improve their LC.

Conclusion

The action research by using AMs to improve students' LC in Nusantara PGRI Kediri University has been conducted and it is found that there is a significant improvement in LC achievement and a change in classroom situation.

AMs are in fact what the students need. When they were carefully selected, they were really beneficial. The students looked relatively more engaged in all activities. The students were more active than before. They commented that the materials were interesting, entertaining, informative, and up to date. They gave model how language was used in real communication and also introduced the culture of the speaker of that language. Thus, they could motivate the students to learn LC and are still the best choice to apply.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Based on the previous experiences that the researcher got during the action research, the researcher could give suggestions particularly for English teachers to:

- a. Use AMs to teach LC to students especially the intermediate students
- b. Pay attention to six of LC skills; discriminating sound, recognizing words, identifying grammatical units, identifying pragmatic units, connecting linguistic cues. Using background knowledge to be improved simultaneously.
- c. Select and present material according to the students' level and need.
- d. Be ready to give necessary assistance whenever students find difficulty
- e. Encourage students to learn LC not only in the classroom but also outside the classroom to make them more familiar with spoken English.

With all of the strength of AMs teachers can take the benefits that AMs can overcome the problems arising in listening class. So, using AMs in listening class is strongly suggested but not to forget with some pedagogical support on linguistic knowledge for students. Students not only learn the contents of the text but also aware of what is going on around us.

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