The Influence of Speakers’ Voice in TOEFL Listening Test

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Abstract

This study is aimed to find out the influence of male and female speaker in Test of English as a foreign language (TOEFL) listening test. In order to attain the needed data in this study, the researcher designed the study under quantitative research approach focused on survey design. The researcher found that the frequency in listening to female speaker in taking Test of English as a foreign language (TOEFL) listening test was higher at the highest score than in listening to male speaker. The results of the study showed that in listening to female speaker was higher average score achieved by the students. However, there were not too far significant differences in both average score. In conclusion, students’ score showed that listening to female speaker was easier to be listened by students since the the students got the higher frequency in the highest range score and mean score.

Key words: Male and Female speaker’ voice, Listening skill, TOEFL

1. INTRODUCTION

Listening is one of the most essential skills for learners because it is used in daily life and it is developed faster than the other language skills (Rost, 2001, P.7). It is a main skill that can affect other skills such as speaking, writing and reading skill. The fact shows that without listening, it is hard for someone to communicate and generate the ideas in English.

When students try to establish and comprehend the listening materials, there are a lot of problems faced by them in listening. Since English is not the first language for Indonesian students, comprehending the conversation and materials in listening comprehension is not easy for them (Muniandy, 2012, p.166). One of the factors influencing the listening performance is speaker factor (Cubait, 2014, p.1).

The speakers’ factors involve language ability of the speaker’, native speaker or non-native speaker. Speakers’ ability affects listener in listening the source. Speaker’s ability means that the ability of native speaker and non native speak such as in producing accents. English native speaker speaks with more correctly, more acceptable, more familiar, and more pleasant accents because that is their own language (Kaur & Raman, 2014, p. 256). However, non-native English speaker
accents’ are mostly influenced by their first language. It may give bad impact in affecting listener’s comprehension in listening because non-native speaker’s accent is less familiar, less acceptable, and less pleasant.

The other speakers’ factors are speaker’s production: voice effect, pronunciation, and speed of delivery (Hamouda, 2013, p. 135). Those factors are different from male and female speaker. There are some differences between male and female voice as well. Male and female’ voice have some differences such as voice effect, pronunciation, speed of speech and so on.

In case of voice effect, Simpson (2009, p.636) claimed that “the larger female vowel space, the greater durational distinction between stressed and unstressed vowels, the longer duration of stressed vowels, and less reduction of vowel qualities to[“]can all be treated as phonetic correlates of speaking clearly”. The female speaker is claimed has clearer voice than male speaker. It is possible that for many students listen to female speaker voice is easier than male speaker because female speaks clearly.

It is clearer that male and female speaker have several differences in producing word. Female produces higher, greater, and longer voice than male. Female has better in pronouncing word, speaks with suitable speed and good tone of voice. This can effect on the result of listening comprehension from listener. It can be stated that the women have clearer speech than male. It favors the idea that female speakers would try to achieve clearer speech than male speakers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definition of Listening

Listening is the ability to identify and understand what others are saying (Saricoban, 1999, p.1). It is the potential for somebody to find out the aim of others speech and acknowledge what speaker talking about. Moreover, Helgesen (2003, p. 24) stated that listening is an active, purposeful process of making sense of what we hear. It is a very complex process and more than simply hearing but it is expected to get and understand the idea of the speech.

Brown (2001, p. 249) said that listening is the psychomotor process of receiving sound through the ear and transmitting them to the brain to get the meaning of the sound that is accepted from the source. Listener needs to receive and understand incoming information (input) by listening to the speaker. The process is not only listening to what they hear but also connect the incoming input with other information they have already known. Since they combine what they hear with their experience and their own ideas, they are creating the meaning in their own minds.

2.2 Process of Listening Comprehension

Richards (2008) explains listening comprehension is divided into two processes that are involved in understanding spoken discourse. They are bottom – up and top – down processing (p. 7). The processes are identified as follow:

2.2.1 The Bottom – Up Processing

Bottom-up processing refers to using the incoming input as the basis for understanding the message. Bottom –up processing is used when the students construct meaning of the information they have about sounds, word meanings, and discourse makers like first, then and after that assemble to their understanding of
what they read or hear one step at a time. At last, it is gradually combining all the information increasingly from the phoneme level up to discourse level features (Richard, 2008, p. 7).

2.2.2 **The Top – Down Processing**

Top – down processing refers to the use of background knowledge in understanding the meaning of message. Top – down processing means using our prior knowledge (schemata) and experiences. It is a process of listening to bring the previous knowledge or prior information to the context of what the listener is going to hear. It is refers to attribution of meaning, draws from one’s own knowledge to the language input (Richard, 2008, p. 9).

2.3 **Listening Problem Factors**

The factors of listening problem are the listeners’ factor, listening text, and speakers’ factor (Cubalit, 2014, p. 1). The first is the listeners’ factors. The listeners’ factors include experiences in listening to the target language, general background knowledge of the world, and lack of practice (Cubalit, 2014, p. 7). The factors of listener affect in listening because it is really influence listening achievement.

2.4 **Principles of Male and Female Voice Differences**

As far as the fact that, female and male voices have several differences in some aspects of phonetics voice, they are:

2.4.1 **Different Acoustic Voice**

The study of vowels and consonants produced by American English speakers analyzed by using Praat software found that in general consonants and vowel were proportionally higher and longer tone in words produces by female speaker than male speaker (Pèpiot, 2012, P. 11). It showed us that female produces more intelligible speech than males. Because female speaker have higher and longer in vowel and consonants voice, it could be linked to female speaker to produce clearer speech than male voice.

2.4.2 **Voice quality**

Voice quality of male and female voice has been found into two differences. The voice quality differences are caused of the vocal folds vibration. Based on Simpson (2009, p. 622), “female vocal folds are shorter and lighter than male and vibrate at approximately twice the male frequency”.

2.4.3 **Different acoustic pitch value**

Pèpiot (2012, p.8), female pitch value and range is higher and greater than male voice. While the ear analyses sound, the higher pitch of voice becomes the greater physical difference between two tones and it helps to differentiate of sound perception between male and female voice. In addition, male and female voice is different in acoustic pitch value. According to (Jena & Panigrahi, 2012, p. 108), the average pitch value for female voice is higher than male voice. In the other study, the result also showed that the average male speaker’ pitch is lower than female speaker (Simpson, 2009, p. 624).

2.4.4 **Voice Onset Time**
According to Simpson (2009, p. 633), in many studies is significantly found that females had longer voice onset time (VOT) consonants than males. Voice onset time is a timing relationship between the release of the beginning of vocal cord vibration and the top closure. The longer VOT is showed from both fortis plosives (p, t, k) and lenis plosives (b, d, g). In another study shows that, VOT produced by Native American English Female speakers is significantly longer and greater in aspirated plosives and non-aspirated plosives (Pèpiot, 2012 P.12).

2.4.5 Voice space

The space of female voice is a larger in the vowel qualities acoustic area than male voice space (Simpson 2009, p. 626). It is shown of the American English language voice that male voice space is thicker than female space. The significant differences found in the back rounded qualities vowel of [a], [i], [o]. Although, the vowel qualities of [u], [e] is relatively close, female vowel voice qualities is still greater than male vowel articulation.

2.4.6 Pronunciation

Male and female voice also differences in pronunciation in a variety of languages. According to Shuy’s study (1969 cited in Xia, 2013. p. 1485), most of male speaker pronounced “ing” in a wrong way. Female voice has better pronunciation than male voice. It showed that female voice is better in pronouncing “-ing” than male’s (Xia, 2013, p. 1). However, less of female speaker didn’t pronounce “ing” in a right way. It proves us that female’s pronunciation is better than male speaker.

2.4.7 Intonation

Female speaker usually speaks with rising intonation rather than falling intonation (Xia, 2013. P. 1485). It is caused that female speaker want to show their gentleness and it sometimes covers the lack of confidence. The women’s high rise tone occurred because of the women often speak in high-pitch voice. However, it is also associated with women emotional instability of female speaker.

2.4.8 Tempo or articulation rate

The result of the study was found that American English male speaker was faster in tempo or articulating sound both in speaking rate and reading rate (Jecewicz at al, 2010, p. 843).

2.4.9 Durational differences

In an attempt to compare between male and female English native speaker durational differences also discussed by Simpson and Ericsdotter (2003, p. 1115), female speaker utterances were found to be longer than male utterance. The greater duration were found to all vowel categories (back rounded vowel, diphthong, bilabial, plosive, long and short and etc).

2.4.10 Reduction voice quality

Female speaker have been found to use less of reduction forms of utterance than males speaker (Simpson & Ericsdotter, 2003, p. 1115). It might be stated that less of reduction in speaking could produce greater and clear voice in female speech. In reduction voice quality, female also were found using less reduction in producing words than males (Simpson, 2009, p.635). According to Whiteside study (1996 cited in Simpson, 2009, p.635), male speaker reduced [?] in word “are” more often than female did.

Simpson and Ericsdotter (2003, p. 1115), in their study of male and female durational differences stated that “a possible sociophonetic explanation is that
female speaker are 'speaking more clearly'”. It can show us that female have a clearer voice than male voice. It is undeniable for many people listen to voice produced by female is easier to be listened than voice produced by male speaker.

2.5 TOEFL Definition

Moreover, Gear and Gear (2002, p. 1) said that TOEFL test is a standardized test that is administered and designed by Education Testing Service (ETS) to assess and evaluate the English proficiency of the language institution where English is the language of instruction of non native speaker. Almost all colleges and universities in many countries accept TOEFL score as the evidence of English ability and use them to measure a person progress in learning English.

2.6 TOEFL (PBT) Test

In Indonesia, there are two types of PBT which are existed; Institutional Testing Program (ITP) and TOEFL equivalent which called TOEFL prediction. TOEFL ITP is officially held by Indonesian International Education Foundation, a US non-profit organization at Jakarta for ITP TOEFL as the country Mater Distribution. In TOEFL ITP test the certificate is limited; only for specific area and institution can be applied in the world. It means the people cannot use certificate to all country in the world but only to the certain country. ETS keeps records the ITP score only for two years (Gear & Gear, 2002, p. 7).

2.7 Aspects in Listening TOEFL

In TOEFL listening test consists three parts of questions; they are part A (short dialogues), part B (conversations), and part C (talks) (Sharpe, 2005, p. 17). Part A consists of thirty questions, generally ask about the meaning of statements by the speakers or the actions that will be taken by the speakers according to the information given in short dialog (Philips, 2001, p. xix). The aspects in part A contains Synonyms, identifying location, stated details, reference and unstated details speaker and activity, similar sound, who, what where, passive, negative expressions, multiple nouns, negative with comparatives, expression of agreement, wishes, idioms, untrue conditions, expression of uncertainty and suggestion and so forth (Philiphs, 2001, p. 26-75). A narrator gives the questions based on the conversations such as "what does the woman mean?," "what does the man imply?,", "what is the main purpose of the talk?, etc.

Question for part B is longer conversations consists of eight questions. The conversations discuss about factual issue. The aspects in part B are to know the topic and detailed information from longer conversation (Philips, 2001, p. 79-83). The students need to listen clearly and draw their own conclusion since topic is stated implicitly. Different to detailed information, the answers are clearly stated in speaker. Lastly, in part C is talks which consist of twelve questions. It is discussed as well as factual information in the long talk or lectures (Gear and Gear, 2002, p.8). The aspects are to know topic and detailed information as well. The students have to be able to draw their own inferences. The text of all questions is straight forward, "why does the professor mention x?", or "based on the instructor speech, what is y?".

3. METHODS

This study was designed under a quantitative research approach focused on survey design. According to Muijs (2004, p. 1), quantitative research are analyzed
data by adopting mathematically based methods (in particular statistic) to explain phenomena by accumulating numerical data. It is discussed with number, quantifiable data, and using statistical procedure. This research was called survey design because the researcher describes the study with quantifiable data of opinion from sample of a population.

Creswell (2012, p. 142), defined that the population is a set of people that form a group who have the same characteristics so the researcher can identify. This research was conducted at English Department at Teacher Training and Education Faculty in Syiah Kuala University. The population of this study was English students who passed Advance Listening subject. The population were about 150 students. Sample is a part of all objects from population that is being studied (Salasi, 2001 p.2). Samples of this quantitative study were 32 students. According to Cohen, et.al, (2007, p. 101), the minimum sample for quantitative study are 30 participants. In this study, writer limited the sample to students who got at least 69 in listening Advanced Listening subject. In this study researcher used one of non-probability technique that is called purposive sampling.

For the instrument, as stated by Arikunto (2010, p.192), instruments are the tool for conducting research by using a specified method. The instrument of this research was TOEFL listening test. There were 30 multiple choice questions and there were 30 items questions of part A from two kinds of listening TOEFL test. First, there were 30 questions in form of short conversations of the first TOEFL listening test. Next, the 30 other questions in part A at the another TOEFL test.

The participants were 32 students from different semester and they have own activities. Because of the participants have their own activities, it was difficult to wait all participants to take the test at the same time. This is the reason why the test not given at the same time. After collecting the data, the writer analyzed data by using Mean measures procedure. According to Djiwandono (1996, p.170), mean formula is used to show the level of students’ achievement in a test as a group in general.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

After giving the test of male and female voice to the students, the writer compared the average score between the score of the test by serving the table. The writer served the table in the following below, in order to know which one is higher average score between male and female voice test.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Interval</th>
<th>Male voice</th>
<th>Female voice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30-41</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42-53</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54-65</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66-77</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78-89</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-101</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>67,7</strong></td>
<td><strong>69,4</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It can be seen that two of the higher range score, female voice test was more dominant than male voice test score. The researcher calculated the data by finding the average score between male and female voice test. The result found that the female voice test was higher mean score that was 69.4 achieved by all the students. Meanwhile, the mean score was calculated to be 67.7 in listening to male speaker voice.

3. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In conclusion, after conducting the listening TOEFL, containing male’s voice and female’s voice it is obvious that listening to female’s speaker was higher frequency and percentage score than male’s speaker. Although this was not too different in comparison 67.7 and 69.4. Thus, listening to female speaker was easier for students in taking listening TOEFL test than male’s speaker.

Firstly for the students, the writer hopes they could practice more often to improve their listening skill in order to be familiar with all speakers’ voice. Secondly, the writer expects that the teachers, lecturers and education practitioners to be more creative, and motivated in developing better listening activities. Next, for the readers, they could get some input and knowledge in reading this study. The writer hopes that the readers could find references and information in listening area.

Last, hopefully, this information can be useful for the further improvement in education development especially in teaching listening. Furthermore, the writer also expects this study can be a reference for those who want to conduct the same research in the future.

REFERENCES


