

EFL Students' Difficulties in Answering Listening TOEFL of Short Dialogue Test

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Abstract

This study investigates the most difficult parts in listening comprehension test faced by undergraduate students from Universitas Teuku Umar. The subject was 30 students who have taken the TOEFL test more than three times. The study used descriptive qualitative research. The data were taken from students' TOEFL score and interview. This study focused on 13 aspects of short dialogues (synonym, similar sound, Who, What and Where, Passive, Negative Expression, Double Negative, Negative with Comparative, "Almost Negative", Expression of Surprise, Expression of Agreement, Uncertainty and Suggestion, Wishes and Untrue Condition, Idiomatic Expression) which adopted from Longman Complete Course for the TOEFL Test. The result found that the most difficult aspects in listening comprehension of short dialogue test were similar sound, uncertainty and suggestion, idiom words, and synonym. It was revealed that the most difficult aspect in listening Part A (short dialogue) is similar sound that was proven from students' incorrect answer (97%), only 3% of them answered correctly, followed by Uncertainty and Suggestion (94%) and idiom words (94%), only 2% of students answered correctly from each of the aspect, and synonym (90%), 3% of them chose the right answers. The result of interview found that most of them got unfamiliar with the sound, lack of practice and low motivation in learning a foreign language. It can be stated that the most difficult aspect in listening short dialogue is similar sound and the factors that cause them hard to answer short dialogue part come from external (unfamiliar sound) and internal problems (lack of practice and low motivation).

Keywords: *Listening Comprehension, Short Dialogue Problems, TOEFL Test.*

1. Introduction

Listening skill is one of receptive skills. It is involved the ability to know and recognize the dialogue, expression, sentence structure, and vocabulary as stated by the audio. The intricate mental process of listening is essential for acquiring a language. The ability to accept auditory signals (i.e., input), deconstruct them into linguistic units (morphemes, words), and then retrieve the meaning of those linguistic units from long-term memory is necessary for understanding what they are hearing. However, part of listening comprehension also entails the transformation of the auditory information into a meaningful interpretation that is compared to prior knowledge (Rost, 2002).

The first component of the TOEFL test is listening comprehension consists of the paper-based and computer-based versions. Forty-five questions make up this section. While listening to recorded lessons, students choose an answer to one of several possible options. In order to prove that they understand spoken English, students must listen to numerous passage types on a tape recording. Due to the tape only being played once and the fact that the information is not contained in the test book, students must pay close

attention (Deborah, 2001). According to Kim and Pilcher (2016), listening comprehension is a test of your capacity to follow both short and complex English conversations. It includes audio recordings that sound like they were made by a class of students at an English-speaking college or university. Your capacity to comprehend spoken language will be evaluated through listening comprehension (Corsetti, 2014). In the listening section, there are three-part of listening, which are short dialogue, long conversation and talks.

Short dialogue is a kind of listening subject that has a short conversation (Bafadal & Rusmini, 2017). Dialogue is a term used to describe conversation between two parties with the goal of understanding one another. Participants involve exchange information, facts, and thoughts while attempting to consider, comprehend, and accept one another. The short conversation is in short form that is only 2-4 sentences between two people followed by 1 question. The points tested in this part are synonyms of the keywords stated in the listening, certain vocabulary, idioms, phrasal verbs, conditionals, wishes, causatives, modals, negative expressions, inferring meaning from intonation, and listens for language functions (Dang, 2016). The TOEFL short dialogue is in brief form, consisting of only 2-4 words between two people, followed by one question. Synonyms of the keywords stated in the listening, specific vocabulary, idioms, phrasal verbs, conditionals, wishes, causatives, modals, negative expressions, inferring meaning from intonation, and listening for language functions are the points examined in this section (Rainy et al., 2014).

The TOEFL score is measured based on the result from three sections of listening comprehension, structure and written expression, and reading comprehension. The hardest of the three sections taken by EFL students is the listening section. Therefore, they must use certain strategic approaches as they listen to longer and more varied passages. In addition, they must adjust to listen both dialogue and monologues on the TOEFL (Silviyanti et al., 2020). Brown (2020) states that when listening to monologues, one should "process extended periods of speech without interruption the stream of speech will go on whether or not the listener comprehends," and when listening to dialogues, one should "find the 'interpersonal and transactional aspects'". Listening to native speakers requires some strategic ways of comprehension that many students would frequently find difficult for some aspects. Therefore, EFL teachers could help and train students to cope with some learning materials, time management, media, and the gradual teaching listening that should be from "basic to more complex" (Saraswaty, 2018).

Many issues with listening difficulties were identified by Buck (2001), including unusual vocabulary, unfamiliar themes, rapid speech tempo, and unfamiliar accents. According to Hasan (2000), the length of spoken passages, challenging grammatical structures, and new terms are the main issues that hinder learners' ability to understand what is being said. Kurita (2012) said that teachers may need to modify their listening exercises to make them more effective because students may find it challenging to master listening comprehension skills. To succeed in language acquisition and increase their intelligible input, learners need to develop their listening comprehension skills. Students are driven to have access to spoken English, such as interactions with native speakers, because doing so can boost their confidence in their ability to understand what they are hearing. Yagang (1994) adds that the problems commonly faced by foreign language students are the message, the speaker, the listener and physical setting.

A large body of research has been devoted to identify the problems in listening comprehension test (Sakdiyah, 2016; Rahmah, 2019; Silviyanti et al., 2020; Soali, 2020; Rina & Tiarina, 2021; Asmawati et al., 2022). First, a study conducted by Rahmah (2019) for English Department of UIN Ar-Raniry. The finding showed that synonym of keyword, expression of agreement, idioms, and identifying detail information are considered difficulty by students in listening comprehension. The result of the interview reveals that

the factors influencing the difficulties came from six factors including tool problem, content of the listening text problems, mental condition, physical condition, environmental condition, and also time problem.

The study of Rina and Tiarina (2021) on the English Department students of STIKIP PGRI Sumatera Barat revealed that problems in answering TOEFL in listening short dialogue were lack of vocabularies, unfamiliar topic, bad sound of speaker device, noisy room and unfamiliar accents of speaker. Besides, factors that caused students in listening short dialogue are message factor, speaker factor, listener factor and physical setting factor. Listening problems are barriers to everyone who learnt languages because listening is the basic of language study. According to Goh (2000, as cited in Hamouda 2013, p.115) stated that listening difficulties are the internal and external characteristic that might interrupt text understanding and real life processing problem directly related to cognitive procedures that take place at various stages of listening comprehension. When faced with those issues on the paper TOEFL test, the majority of students find the difficulties in listening comprehension for the paper TOEFL test.

Last study conducted by Asmawati et al. (2022) showed that most students encountered three problems in listening section. The first problem was listening to material such as grammatical structure, unfamiliar words, unclear pronunciation, speakers' speed, and long spoken text. The second was the listeners' personal problems, such as worrying, losing concentration, having limited English vocabulary, and rarely practicing TOEFL tests. The third was the environmental situation, such as the noise around and the low quality of the recording.

Based the explanation above, the previous researches have investigated about the general difficulties' aspect in listening comprehension of the TOEFL test, this research will focus to analyze the difficult aspects in answering listening TOEFL of short dialogue test. Regarding to the researchers' observation on students' TOEFL score at Language Center of Universitas Teuku Umar, most of them had the lower correct answers in answering listening comprehension among structure and reading test. In listening part, the lowest correct answers they got were short dialogue part. Therefore, the study aims to seek for what are the most difficult aspects for students in answering short dialogue section and will elaborate the factors that the students faced difficulties in listening comprehension test.

2. Method

The research method used is descriptive qualitative research to find out the most difficult parts in answering short dialogue of listening test. The population of this study is students of Universitas Teuku Umar who have taken the TOEFL test on period of August to September 2022. The sample used was purposive sampling. The research took 30 students' TOEFL score who have taken the TOEFL test more than three times from Language Center of Universitas Teuku Umar. The language Center adopted the TOEFL test from Longman book. The data of this study were collected using students' TOEFL score and interview.

This interview aims to get the more information toward the student's problem in Listening Comprehension of TOEFL test. Then 5 of them were selected as the participant for interview. The data were presented in form of percentage of 13 aspects of short dialogues (Synonym, Similar Sound, Who, What and Where, Passive, Negative Expression, Double Negative, Negative with Comparative, Almost Negative, Expression of Surprise, Expression of Agreement, Uncertainty and Suggestion, Idiom Words and the last Wishes and Untrue Condition) which adopted from Longman Complete Course for the TOEFL Test (2001).

The parts of the test that had the most dominant error rate were regarded as the

most difficult for students to complete in the listening short dialogue test. The students' responses to each question were taken into consideration to analyze the qualitative data from the interview. The data were firstly transcribed the information. Then the data were used to assess the variables affecting the participants' difficulty in the TOEFL listening short dialogue test. The researchers also included descriptions to make it easy to understand.

Many steps of data analysis were performed. The researcher started by examining the students' answers to the test. Then they were categorized the correct and incorrect responses. Then the data were calculated each topic's percentage of errors using Sugiyono (2006) formula:

$$P = \frac{F}{N}$$

Descriptions:

P = Percentage of error in each topic

F = The number of wrong answers in each topic

N = The total number

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. The Results from Students' Answer of Short Dialogue Part

This table shows number of correct and incorrect items of students' answer in short dialogue test. The instrument is used to find out the most difficult elements dealt by 30 students in answering short dialogue of listening comprehension test. The results are presented in the following table:

Table 1. Error Statistic of Short Dialogue

Item No.	Correct Item	Percentage	Incorrect Item	Percentage
1	5	16.7%	25	83.3%
2	11	36%	19	63%
3	3	10%	27	90%
4	6	20%	24	80%
5	6	20%	24	80%
6	7	23%	23	77%
7	7	23%	23	77%
8	1	3%	29	97%
9	3	10%	27	90%
10	7	23%	23	77%
11	7	23%	23	77%
12	5	16%	25	84%
13	5	16%	25	84%
14	10	30%	20	70%
15	4	13.4%	26	86.6%
16	8	26%	22	74%
17	9	30%	21	70%
18	15	50%	15	50%
19	2	6%	28	94%
20	2	6%	28	94%
21	6	20%	24	80%
22	12	40%	18	60%
23	1	3%	29	97%
24	7	23%	23	77%

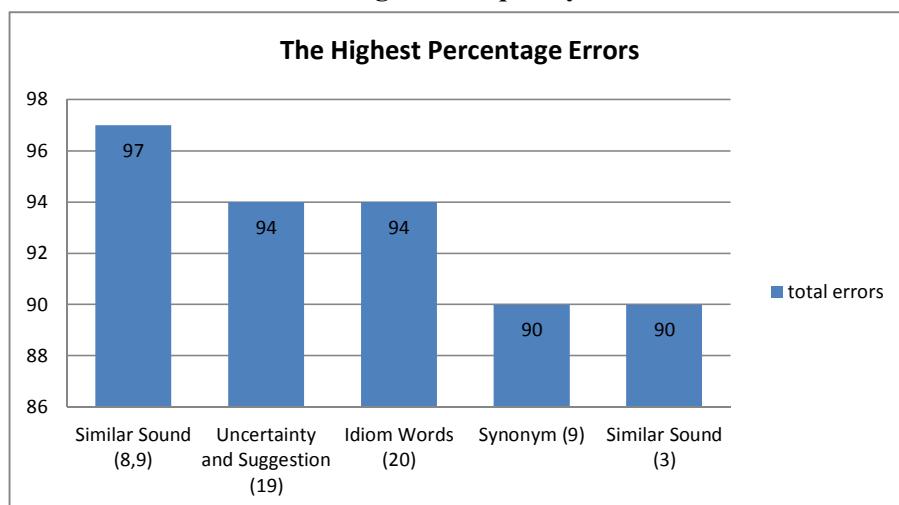
25	4	13.4%	26	86.6%
26	7	23%	23	77%
27	6	20%	24	80%
28	7	23%	23	77%
29	6	20%	24	80%
30	5	16%	25	84%
Total	178	20%	715	80%

Table 1 shows the result of students' test in listening comprehension section in short dialogue part. The total of students answered correctly were only 20% while incorrect answers' students reached 80%. From the table, it has been shown that the highest percentage of students' incorrect answers is number 8 and 23. Number 8 and 23 are similar sound aspect while the lowest one is number 18 about negative expression. The highest percentage of students' incorrect answers is number 8 and 23 with 97%. The lowest percentage of students' incorrect answer is shown in number 18 with 50%.

From the table above, it can be concluded that the researchers specified 6 items considered as the most difficult question overall the 30 question in short dialogue section by percentage range of 90-100%. Based on the result, short dialogue is the most difficult part for students because they have lower correct answer (20%) than incorrect one (79.8%). It can be proven that listening to native speakers requires some strategic ways of comprehension that many students would frequently find difficult for some aspects (Saraswaty, 2018) because the most problem found in listening comprehension is related to content of the listening text (Sa'adiyah, 2016). Sa'adiyah (2016) added that content involves unfamiliar words, complex grammatical, long spoken text, complexity of sentence and unfamiliar topic. Those problems lead listening difficulties to EFL students. It is also related to the result of study from Asmawati, Akmas & Suhrah (2022) which showed that the students' problems in TOEFL listening sections are in three categories; firstly, material problems such as grammatical structure, unfamiliar words, unclear pronunciation, speakers' speed, and long-spoken text. Secondly, personal problems including worrying, losing concentration, limited English vocabulary, and rarely practicing TOEFL tests. The last is environmental situation such as noise around and low quality of recording.

The following table presents the highest frequency of error in short dialogue part:

Table 2. The Highest Frequency of Incorrect Answers



Based on the result, similar sound (97%) with number 8 and 23 is the highest error percentage dealt by students among the other questions. The majority of students were failed to answer the question. It deals with Hamouda's statement (2003) who said

that some factors cause the foreign language students deal with problems in listening TOEFL include accent, pronunciation, speed of speech, insufficient vocabulary, the different accents of speakers, a lack of concentration, anxiety, and impaired recording quality were the major listening problems encountered by EFL learners. Accent and pronunciation from the native speaker are the problems that cause students do not understand the information given. Mostly, students tend to choose the similar sound they listen from speaker. Based on the strategies stated by Longman, one of skill in answering the listening comprehension is avoid similar sound because the similar sound mostly is the wrong answer. Restatement of a key word or idea is probably the correct answer (Philip, 2001). Klepousniotouh (2002) said that a single string of words (i.e., an utterance) may lead to more than one interpretation simply because one of the words has more than one meaning. Often by means, in this case the word dressing is a homonym, in which a lexical item accidentally carries two (or more) distinct and unrelated meanings. In addition, the dominant incorrect answers in short dialogue are idiom word and uncertainty and suggestion also get the highest error percentage. Based on the result above, similar sound is the main problem faced by common foreign language students.

Table 3. Frequently Question Aspects of Short Dialogue

No.	Aspect	Item Number	Percentage
1.	Synonym	1,2,4,7, 9,13,22, 26	26.6
2.	Similar Sound	3, 8, 23	10
3.	Who, What, where	5	3.4
4.	Passive	10, 14	6.6
5.	Negative Expression	12, 15, 16, 18, 21	16.6
6.	Double Negative	24	3.4
7.	Negative with Comparative	27	3.4
8.	“Almost” Negative	28	3.4
9.	Expression of Surprise	30	3.4
10.	Expression of Agreement	11	3.4
11.	Uncertainty and Suggestion	17, 19	6.6
12.	Idiom words	6, 20	6.6
13.	Wish and Untrue Condition	25, 29	6.6

Based on the table above, there are 13 aspects of short dialogue question frequently asked based on skills adapted from Longman book. It can be concluded that the most frequent questions in short dialogue part are synonym, negative expression, similar sound and expression of agreement. From the table 3.3, it has been stated that synonym is the most dominant questions asked in listening short dialogue test.

3.2 The Results from the Students' Interviews

To know the factors that make students' difficulties in listening comprehension test, the additional data were taken from interview. Based on the result from interview, there are some factors that made students faced difficulties in listening section particularly in short dialogue section. First factor is unfamiliar with the sound. Based on the results of interview, the students faced difficulty to comprehend the speaker expression and took time to understand the speaker's statement. Based on the finding from Andi et al. (2022), students got difficulty in understanding sentence structure, thus, the students had difficulty understanding the audio because they had poor grammar, so their ability to listen to complex sentences was lacking. According to Gilakjani & Sabouri (2006), English is a foreign language learned by students, which makes them not know a lot of English vocabulary, students may encounter a new term that causes them to pause and

consider the meaning of that word, causing them to miss the next portion of the speech. Yulia and Lastri (2019) added that misunderstanding about a word in English interrupts students' listening and makes them miss some information in listening to speakers. They usually try to understand the speaker's whole words, but when they get words they do not recognize, they focus on those words and make them lose concentration.

Second factor is lack of practice. This factor comes from individual's problem from the test takers or students. Based on the study from Andi et al. (2022), individual problems may come from having limited English Vocabulary because of lack of practice. One of the most important aspects of English is vocabulary. It is the most crucial for students studying English as a foreign language. Hamouda (2013) stated that many students stop listening and consider the meaning of an unknown word they heard. It disrupts the flow of speech then students may miss essential information. A lack of practice and a tendency to lack preparation often occurs in answering TOEFL questions. Even though the TOEFL tests had been scheduled, several students started to study the day before the test. Students with low TOEFL scores tend to be less prepared for the TOEFL test, especially in listening and memorizing vocabulary and rarely reviewing TOEFL material.

The last problem is low motivation to learn English. Based on Sa'diyah's study (2016), it was found that the students considered that listening skill was very important skill but sometimes it was boring and not interesting. They were bored because they have some difficulties when they faced listening test and they have poor knowledge regarding the listening strategy. Most students have big problem related to psychological side. Boredom and frustration may affect the extent to which attention was paid to listening. This occurs as a result of poor stimulation caused by disinterest in the topic, lack of motivation, failure in the part of the teacher to present meaningful material in a stimulating manner, or presenting the lecture in a monotone instigating sleep (Hamouda, 2013).

4. Conclusions

Based on the result of study above, there are some highlight conclusions:

1. The most difficult parts in short dialogue part of listening comprehension test are similar sound (97%), Uncertainty and Suggestion (94%), idiom words (94%), synonym (90%) and similar sound again (90%).
2. Factors that made students difficulties in answering listening comprehension are unfamiliar with the sound, lack of practice and low motivation.

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