BOOSTING LISTENING COMPETENCE OF L2 LEARNERS THROUGH READING SCRIPTS

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ABSTRACT
This pilot study investigated the impact of reading a written script on the second language listening achievement of high intermediate English as second language (L2) students. Thirty-five high-intermediate ESL students participated in this study. The participants took part in both the bassline conditions (listening without the script intervention) and the reading intervention condition (listening along with a script). The scores of the tests were analyzed using paired sample t-test. The findings revealed that there was a significant difference between the two conditions. The reading intervention has a major effect on second language listening comprehension performance of L2 learners.
Keywords: Listening achievement; Intermediate learners; Written scripts

INTRODUCTION

Second language (L2) learners receive a great deal of knowledge regarding the second language skills and guidelines by listening. Educators try to create the proper environment for learners to develop their listening skills by constructing different listening strategies. Moreover, instructors stimulate the second language environment by using technology such as audio, video texts, and computer-based instructions to advocate both independent and collaborative learning. Many scholars (Coniam, 2000; Hayati & Mohmedi, 2011; Lankshear & Synder, 2000; Rost, 2002; Salaberry, 1999; Winke, Gass, & Sydorenko, 2010), throughout the years, have emphasized that the use of technology enhances the instructional materials in the educational system in general and second language learning in particular. Multimedia instructional materials such as visual aids, animated graphics, and computer-based instruction have been introduced to augment the progression of the educational practice (Chen, Dwyer, & Lin, 2006). Also, integrating other language skills, such as reading a written script, can have a positive impact in providing modified input to second language (L2) learners, enhancing their understanding, and eventually progressing the level of their listening achievement (Grgurović & Hegelheimer, 2007).

In L2 classrooms, the application of multimedia listening materials creates positive effects on the learning level of students. They increase students' motivation and enhance their performance in the classroom (Richards, 1990). Therefore, the researchers will be investigating the impact of reading a written script on listening achievement and using technology (computers) as a tool to combine these processes. In other words, this study examines the effect of reading a written script of the listening materials while L2 learners are listening to the audio text.

LITERATURE REVIEW

ACTION LISTENING PROCESS

Listening comprehension is a significant skill in foreign language teaching and learning. Therefore, augmenting listening skills of L2 learners is as essential as other language skills in acquiring the language. Learners, who develop action listening process (i.e. active thinking), grow to be better listeners (Rost, 1991) as it supports their listening comprehension of the content materials.

Developing strategies to support the understanding of what is being said can improve the learners` listening skills. Accordingly, Rost (2002) introduced a sequence of listening strategies that supports action listening process, (a) *attentive listening* which means paying attention to the listener`s spoken speech to obtain understanding; (b) *intensive listening*, which is considered a vital feature of language acquisition, is recognizing the language form and distinguishing between the sounds, phonemes, and stressed words in an utterance; (c) *selective listening* involves the focus on cues in the speech that help with understanding the utterance; and (d) *interactive listening* involves the listener ability to interact in a real life listening situation to gain the ability to communicate with others and decipher any possible misunderstanding.

To further enhance action listening process and to retain input of the topic under focus, using technology such as computers can assist the instructor to create appropriate strategies that motivate the learners and help develop their listening proficiency (Taylor & Gitsaki, 2003). For instance, incorporating written script reading into listening materials, can expand L2 learners' understanding of the listening materials.

INTEGRTATING READING WITH LISTENING

L2 learners are faced with some difficulties during the listening process such as fast speech, new vocabulary, and failure to match the spoken form with the written form (Goh, 1999; Chang & Read, 2006). These difficulties result in poor performance of L2 learners when they are watching a video. However, there are some factors that could assist L2 learners to perform well during the listening process by having them see the written form of the audio text (reading a written script) while listening. That is, if L2 learners are given the opportunity to read the text while they listen, it is more likely that they will improve their listening comprehension.

Some studies (Field, 2008; Vandergrift, 2011) have shown the effectiveness of reading a written script on listening comprehension. When L2 learners read the text while they are listening, it becomes much easier for them to comprehend what they are listening to. When investigating learners' attitudes towards multimedia (video, audio and script), Brett (1996) found that 86.9% of students reported that their listening skills had improved because of a multimedia application used. Osada (2001) indicates that providing L2 listeners with aural text and its transcription would assist L2 listeners develop awareness of the relationship between form and meaning as well as word recognition skills. In addition to focusing on utilizing written scripts while listening in L2 classrooms, some scholars (Hayati & Mohmedi, 2011; Winke, Gass, & Sydorenko, 2010), centered their attentions on using captioning videos in the same language of learning in order to enhance the learners understanding of the listening materials. The application of this method has increased widely in L2 classrooms in the past decade. It has been believed that learners who watch videos with captioning are able to follow and connect the sounds that they hear to the words that they see, and, as a result, they learn how to articulate and understand the meaning of unknown words from context (Danan, 2004).

The impact of reading a written script on listening, however, can only be advantageous when students' reading skills are high. Accordingly, Chang (2009) explains that "to include written text support while listening is to compensate for a learners' listening deficiency, but this means that students must be able to read at least as fast as the speech rate" (p. 661). Thus, if L2 learners' reading skills are low, providing scripts might not be as beneficial.

As the reviewed literature has shown, applying multimedia in L2 classroom could have a positive impact on L2 when combined with script reading. Although there are much more studies that investigated the impact of subtitles and captions on advanced L2 learners' listening comprehension, we have not identified many studies that targeted the benefits of written scripts on less proficient L2 learners. Therefore, this study looks at the impact of reading a written script on high-intermediate L2 learners' listening achievement.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of written script reading on listening comprehension and achievement on high-intermediate ESL learners. Thirty-five students participated in the present study and took part in the two conditions: baseline (without reading script) and intervention (with reading script) conditions. Paired sample t-test was conducted to test the hypothesis that assumes there is no difference between the two phases, i.e. with reading a written script or without reading a written script, on the participants' listening achievement. The findings of this study would help answer the following research question: To what extent does reading a written script impact listening achievement on high-intermediate L2 learners?

METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS

A total of thirty-five high-intermediate ESL students, age ranges from 17 to 27, participated in this study. The recruited participants represent a diverse population and are from different nationalities including Brazil, China, Japan, Kuwait, Libya, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and UAE. They were all enrolled at university- based intensive English programs located at the Northwest United States. These intensive programs welcome new students every two months and require these new students to take a replacement test to identify their level. There were three classes of high intermediate level involved in the data collection. Most of the participants plan to apply to American universities to pursue academic degrees. The participants had undergone the two experiment phases: phase 1) receiving listening task without the intervention (without reading script), and phase 2) receiving the listening intervention (with reading script).

INSTRUMENTS

In this study, two listening clips and two comprehension tests from Pearson Education NorthStar Listening and Speaking 3rd Edition series (2009) were used to measure participants' ability to understand oral English at the university level. The materials were compatible to the participants' proficiency levels as they were taken from higher intermediate listening courses. Since the participants were English language learners who plan to pursue their academic degrees in the United States, the Pearson Education NorthStar series tests were one of the best measures to determine their listening comprehension achievement. According to the series editors, the materials presented are based on authentic resources and relevant for ESL learners. The courses level, moreover, correlate to TOEIC, TOEFL, and CEF score ranges to better prepare learners from different proficiency levels to succeed outside the language classroom.

The tests aimed at evaluating how well learners combine their listening and reading skills to perform academic tasks. Two listening tests were selected from the NorthStar series to be used in this study. One was the baseline test, the other was the intervention test. Each test consisted of a clip discussing topics about nature sciences, social sciences, humanities, or arts followed by 3 multiple-choice, 3-4 true/false questions, and 3-4 short answer questions. The tests are selected within the same level of equivalency to ensure the reliability of the instrument. Also, the tests provided by Pearson Education NorthStar series are prepared based on research and experience; therefore, these tests have undergone structured and standardized procedures to balance the level of difficulty within the tests. This type of test has been chosen to increase the internal validity and to eliminate the instrumentation threat.

INTERVENTION

To test the students' listening comprehension achievement, the participants were introduced to two phases. Phase 1) involves listening to the clip without having the written script whereas phase 2) entails following the script a long with the listening clip. The aim of using the intervention, which is reading while listening, is to see whether reading a written script has greatly affected listening (Chang, 2009), and also to see if written scripts can provide L2 listeners with more information than listening and relistening (Lund, 1991). The listening clips were transcribed and provided to the participants to follow while listening. The participants could see these transcripts on the left side of their computer screen. However, these scripts disappeared when the listening clips were stopped.

PROCEDURES

This study was conducted during an academic listening course. Two sessions were selected over one semester to collect the data. The researchers were present to explain the test procedures and to observe the participants' behavior while they took the tests. In the first session, participants watched a clip followed by a listening test. The clip and the test were viewed on a computer screen where they could see the speaker(s) while listening and the questions while answering. The participants listened to an academic lecture and answered three multiple choice questions and three true/false questions. On the intervention phase, the participants could see the video on the right side of the screen, whereas on the left side, they could read or follow the transcription of the video prompts while listening. After listening, they answered four true/false questions and four short answer questions. During the study, the tests have been integrated into the normal testing routine to exclude the threat of reactive arrangements and increase the internal validity.

DATA ANALYSIS

In this study, a paired-sample t-test was used to detect the differences between the two phases. The test design represented the difference within phases to identify the participant level in the baseline and their progress when the intervention was introduced. The dependent variable of the design is listening achievement whereas the independent variable is reading a written script with alpha set at .05. The questions of the tests (i.e. 6 questions on phase 1 test and 8 questions on phase 2 test) were totaled to be used in the design statistical test that was conducted using SPSS. The *F* statistic was calculated to assess effects of the intervention.

RESULTS

The results show that there was a significant difference in the scores for students listening achievement on the baseline phase ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.07$) and the intervention phase ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.30$); $t(34) = 3.02$, $p = 0.005$. A comparison was piloted for this purpose between conditions (baseline and intervention) being measured repeatedly. The *F* value of the main effect of time was reported to be significant $p = .0001$ with an alpha set on .05. There was a significant difference by group over time. The intermediate ESL students, who received the reading treatment, had mean score of 3.21in the first phase at the beginning of the study; however, these learners

had improved dramatically and received a mean score of 4.00 in the second phase. It is not surprising that the ESL learners had performed well after receiving the reading intervention since it had previously effected listening achievement greatly and that effect represented a high level of comprehension gain (Chang, 2009). In the following diagram (Figure 1), the students in the baseline phase scored lower in the pretest than in the intervention phase, however, after introducing the intervention, the scores of the intervention phase increased significantly. The students' performance in the post-test was almost doubly higher the performance of the pretest.

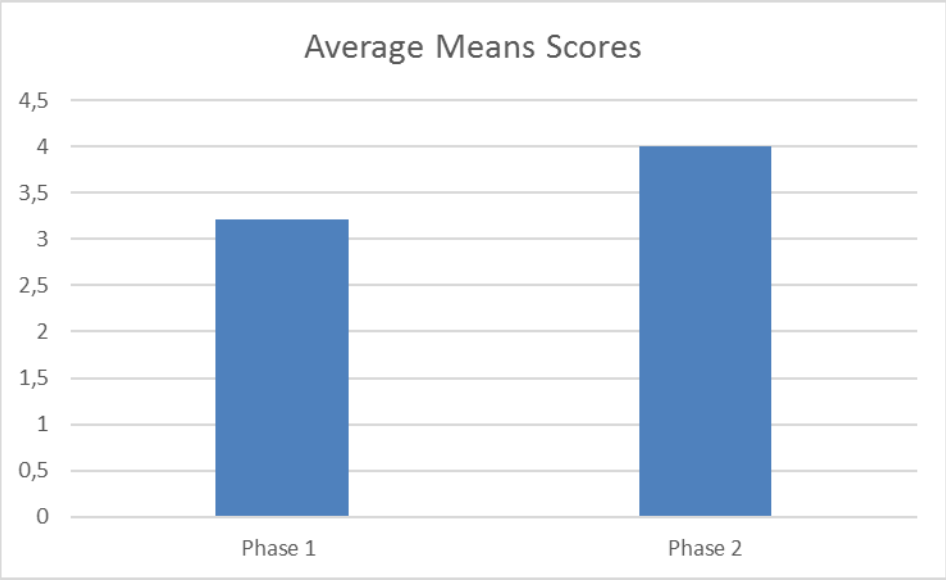

Figure 1. Average Means Scores

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

The findings of the study show that the students performed better in the second phase (with the presence of written scripts) than on the baseline phase. Analyzing the presented results, one might argue that written scripts could have contributed to fulfill some of Rost's (2002) listening strategies of *intensive listening*, where learners were able to recognize the words bounds and phrases and differentiate between their sounds as all were provided in a script. *Selective listening* was also highlighted as the participants were provided multimedia representation of the listening text (audio, video, and written script), which could have boosted their recognition of the speech cues and in turn enhanced their understanding proven by their higher scores on the posttest. This study conflicts with the redundancy principle (Sweller, 2005) of the cognitive load theory that suggests the effect of redundant input (i.e. video, audio and script) on learners hinders the learning process. In contrast, the current study found that using multimedia inputs was beneficial to the learners.

As indicated in previous literature, this condition (written script) was appropriate for the intermediate L2 learners. One explanation for this may be attributed to the fact that reading skills of the intermediate L2 learners were high enough to enable them to perform better when the script was combined with the listening video. This finding supports Chang's (2009) claim that the reading proficiency of L2 learners should be as decent as their listening proficiency.

Another reason why the L2 learners' understanding of the listening materials was better when they were supported by written scripts of the same listening video might be related to the semantic and syntactic cues provided in the written scripts. That is, L2 learners might have been able to decode the content based on their word recognition, sentence structure and contextual knowledge associated with the written text (Chang, 2011; Vandergrift, 2007), which in turn helped them understand the listening video. It could have been challenging for them to recognize these cues if they were not provided with the written script. However, the two baseline and intervention phases, had the same conditions except that in the intervention phase the students was exposed to the reading treatment. Interaction of pretesting and treatment comes into play when the pretest provokes participants so that they react to the treatment inversely (Dimitrov & Rumrill, 2003). For example, it is hard to ignore the fact that some participants in the baseline phase might have got more practice with listening, after sensing that their performance was not adequate on the pretest, which could have affected their posttest scores.

In brief, listening comprehension is considered to be a very essential skill in L2 learning. Therefore, learners need to be instructed following various methods where different options and strategies are provided. Giving learners the choice between diverse help options to select from (including written scripts) can be a practical strategy with which leaners successfully engage and interact with authentic materials and contexts so that they acquire language proficiency, and eventually decode L2 content without any support. In future research, a larger sample size needs to be considered in order to increase the reliability of the findings as well as follow-up interviews to determine the effectiveness of such help options from the learner's prospective.

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