

**AMERICAN ACCENT TRAINING TO DEVELOP TOEFL LISTENING  
COMPREHENSION SKILL OF FIRST YEAR STUDENTS AT  
PGRI UNIVERISTY OF YOGYAKARTA**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study is aimed at developing students's ability in encountering TOEFL Listening Comprehension. It is conducted by finding the correlation between pronunciation and listening. Researcher uses Barron's American Accent Training as the media. The particiapts are 28 first year students of English Department of PGRI University of Yogyakarta. Students enrolled a pre-test to measure their ability in listening comprehension. After pre-test students are given the American Accent Training in 4 sections. At the end of the training students enrolled post-test to observe the effectivity of American English Accent.*

*The result of both tests show that the average number of correct in listening comprehension is 7.5 on the pre-test and 17.3 on the post-test. Thus, the average number of correct increases up to 10%. It can be said that the number of correct has significantly boosted. It proves that there is a positive effect between listening and pronunciation.*

*Keywords: listening, toefl, pronunciation, american, accent*

**INTRODUCTION**

In Indonesia, Listening has generally been neglected as a skill in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). This is because the focus of ELT in Indonesia is on reading and grammar translation method skills. The chances are, Indonesian Learners of English barely understand the spoken English and most of Indonesian learners of English consider that TOEFL Listening Comprehension is the hardest part in TOEFL since it is spoken by the native English speakers of North America.

TOEFL is made in The United States of America (USA). This test is aimed at measuring the level of English proficiency on nonnative speakers of English. It is required

primarily by English-language colleges and universities. There are some parts in TOEFL that lerners of English should be able to deal with. One of them is Listening Comprehension, this part is intended to demonstrate their ability to understand spoken English, examinees must listen to various types of passages on a tape recording and respond to multiple choice questions about the passage (Phillips, 2001).

Since TOEFL is made in USA, it uses the American English for its listening comprehension part. On the other hand, Indonesian learners of English are not used to listen to American English. That is why they have difficulties in understanding the spoken

English especially the American English in TOEFL. As the result, Indonesian learners of English scarcely get good scores in TOEFL listening comprehension. Therefore, at least Indonesian Learners of English should know how the Americans talk in their distinctive accent (American English Accent).

Listening itself is also not an easy skill to be acquired because it requires listeners to make meaning from the oral input by drawing upon their background knowledge of the world and of the second language (Byrnes, 1984; Nagle & Sanders, 1986; Young, 1997) and produce information in their long term memory and make their own interpretations of the spoken passages (Murphy, 1985; Mendelsohn, 1994; Young, 1997). In other words, listeners need to be active processors of information (Young, 1997). Meanwhile, Vandergrift (1996, 1997, and 2003) asserts that listening is a complex, active process of interpretation in which listeners try to suit what they hear with their prior knowledge. This process is more complex for second language learners who have limited memory capacity of the target language (Richards, 1983) thus requiring them to utilize various listening strategies. Learners whose input of target language is limited have to encounter the obstacles in listening comprehension.

In Indonesia, English is acknowledged as a foreign language which makes the ELT in this country applies the teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL). Teaching listening in Indonesia provides the series of disputes among experts. Listening to foreign language sounds requires tremendous efforts. Teaching

listening to English as a second language learner (ESL) is different from teaching listening to English as a foreign language learners (EFL).

Thus, teachers and researchers should pay serious attention to this tricky skill. In order to develop this skill, Indonesian learners of English must have adequate input of English sounds, learners have to create substitute input to the tape by practicing the American Accent by themselves. Not only listening to the American English speakers but learners can also practice pronouncing the American Accent out loud. By practicing the accent learners are expected to be more familiar to the accent.

### **Identification of the Problem**

The inadequacy of capability to understand spoken American English has dragged down the Indonesian learners of English to have insufficient score in TOEFL listening comprehension. To solve the problem of the Indonesian Learners of English in developing TOEFL listening comprehension skills and prepare them as active listeners in language learning is a big challenge. Learners have to be aware that the Americans have their own way in speaking their language. It is different from the British English, one of the main differences between the way an American talks and the way the rest of the world talks is that the Americans do not really move their lips.

In TOEFL listening comprehension, the speakers talk the way they do in their own country (U.S.A). Therefore, listening remains one of the most difficult skills due to certain

reasons. In order to encounter the skill, one has to be aware of the nature of spoken American English which is directly related to the phonological features of the language. Therefore, American Accent Training should be implemented and practiced. This study attempts to prove that the American Accent Training has positive effect on developing TOEFL listening comprehension.

### **Problem**

The literature on the instruction and acquisition of TOEFL listening comprehension suggests different techniques for helping Indonesian learners of English to develop this skill. However, few research has been done on integrating skills in order to reinforce listening skill development. Teaching pronunciation may serve as a counteracting factor against the difficulty in developing listening comprehension skills. The writer will not discuss all of the problems above because of the limited time, fund, ability, and other aspects of the writer. He only focuses on the effect of American Accent Training on developing TOEFL listening comprehension of first year of English Study Program students in PGRI Univeristy of Yogyakarta.

### **Research Questions**

This study is aimed at how the training process is implemented in teaching TOEFL listening comprehension and to find out the positive effect of American Accent Training on developing TOEFL Listening Comprehension of first year of English Study Program students in PGRI University of Yogyakarta.

The results of this research may contribute to the literature by suggesting a new way to develop TOEFL listening comprehension skills. The results of this study may shed light on the extant debate over how to develop the listening comprehension of Indonesian learners of English. American Accent Training in classrooms, when applied as part of regular teaching, may enhance TOEFL listening comprehension skills. English Language teachers/lecturers, administrators, curriculum designers, and material developers may draw on the findings to shape curriculum and syllabus. Teachers may create materials and activities accordingly.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Developing listening is a subject of debate to many researchers. According to several researchers (e.g., Buck, 2001; Field, 2004; Goh, 2000; Graham, 2006; Rost, 2002; Tsui & Fallilove, 1998), learners should be trained in the aforementioned processes of listening, bottom-up and top-down processes, to use the both together because one alone is not enough to develop listening comprehension. Brown (2008) explains that in real-world listening bottom-up and top-down processes occur together, and which one is needed more depends on the purpose of the listening, the content of the input, learners familiarity with the text type, and so forth.

Therefore, it is difficult to separate these two processes. Strategy use as a result of processing demands as mentioned before is also highly recommended (e.g., Mendelsohn,

1995; Lynch, 1995; Rixon, 1986; Ur, 1984). However, using strategies alone will not aid in improving this involved process. The previous literature suggests integrating various techniques into classrooms such as benefiting from authentic materials, and use of technology (e.g., Rixon, 1986; Rubin, 1995).

Using technology can promote the development of listening comprehension by providing learners with compelling, interesting material (McBride, 2009; Rost, 2007) and it can also aid listening comprehension development by enhancing listening input (Chapelle, 2003). Using authentic materials include use of songs, TV serials, movies, documentaries; and using technology includes use of videos, computers, and the Internet.

## **DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

To measure the students (participants) ability in listening comprehension skill, first, the researcher will test (pre-test) the participants before they are forced to drill the American Accent Training. Second, The training given is Barron's American Accent Training. It is series of drilling to train their oral reproduction and training will last at least 240 minutes training. The last, the participants will undergo the post-test to find out their progress in listening comprehension skill.

The method of the study was a descriptive one. Specifically, this study was correlational study. A correlational study is a scientific study in which a researcher investigates associations between variables .

The goal of correlation research is to find out whether one or more variables can predict other variables. Arikunto (1998:251) states that the objective of the correlation research is to find out whether or not a relationship exists between the variables, to calculate the strength of the relationship, and to determine the significance of effects. In this study, the method is applied to find out the effects of American Accent Training on developing TOEFL listening comprehension skill.

The participants of this study are the first semester students of the English Education Study Program of PGRI University of Yogyakarta in academic year 2013/2014. The sample was taken by using convenience sampling. Since the first semester students were not accustomed yet to dealing with listening material. There will be 30 students or participants.

To collect the data, two techniques are used. They are listening pre-test and post-test. After both two test, the data will be analyzed to determine the effects of pronunciation awareness training to listening comprehension.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

In this study, the data is quantitative, it is obtained from the result of pre-test and post-test. Both of them will be analyzed descriptively. Therefore, the topic will be most discussed in this chapter is the score of pre-test and post-test.

### **Result before the Training**

The pre-test is the whole section of the Section One in TOEFL which is taken from Longman Complete Course for TOEFL by

Deborah Phillips. The average number of correct is 7.5. It can be said that the number of correct is still deficient. Therefore, the students need to be trained to encounter the American Accent. The writer chooses to use Barron's American Accent Training because it contains whole material about tackling the American Accent from Phonetics to Suprasegmental factor in the accent.

After pre-test the students are given 360 minute-training of Barron's American Accent Training. It is divided into four meetings. After the series of training the students are given the Post-test to measure whether they have made improvement or not. The Post-Test is taken from the Post-test of Longman Complete Course for TOEFL by Deborah Phillips.

### **Significant Result**

After analyzing the result of both tests, it is perfectly clear that there is a significant development of students' ability in TOEFL Listening Comprehension. In table 1, the average number of correct is 7.5, the result of course is far from expectation then after the training the number of correct shows the significant result. The average number of correct of post-test is 17.22, it boosts to the number of correct up-to 10%.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the Pre-test, the researcher finds the students have inadequate number of correct in answering the TOEFL Listening Comprehension section. To develop the number of corrects, the researcher uses the Barron's American English Accent. In each section of the book, there are always well-

organized exercises related to mastering the American Accent. The Post-test result shows that the students are able to boost the number of correct in TOEFL Listening Comprehension section.

Before the training, the average number of correct in TOEFL Listening Comprehension skill is 7,5 then after they have enrolled the training the average number of correct in Post-test was 17,3. It means that the students have increased the score about 10%.

This brings to the conclusion that there is a close relation between pronunciation and listening skill. Mastering pronunciation especially the pronunciation of North American accent makes the students getting used to Listening Comprehension in TOEFL Test. It can be said that the Barron's American Accent Training has a significant role in boosting the number of correct in TOEFL Listening Comprehension section.

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