

Digital Media for Pragmatic-based Pre-TOEFL Listening

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Abstract: Based on a multi-year Research and Development, the study shows that there are five primary causes of difficulty in understanding pragmatic meanings in Pre-TOEFL listening, namely, Speech Rate Delivery, Voice, Sentence Complexity, Mishearing and Colloquies. As a follow-up, it is essential that the draft of the listening materials and supplementary digital media be developed. Two types of digital media are supplemented in the draft: the researcher-made media and the adopted digital audio and video media. The content of the media is based on the characteristics of each cause of the pragmatic difficulty. As the basis for the development (Development phase), the research findings obtained from the research activities (Research phase) and the Rubric of the Digital Media for Pragmatic-based Pre-TOEFL Listening are presented in Results and Discussion section of this paper. This listening book is prospective CALL to boost the English language proficiency of Indonesian learners of English, particularly the master's degree students.

1 INTRODUCTION

Generally, daily communications imply pragmatic meanings. Lack of pragmatic competence affects English language proficiency (Sirikhan & Prapphal, 2011). In line with it, inferring pragmatic meaning is difficult for the Indonesian learners of English which leads to pragmatic failure and low proficiency (Arifuddin & Susanto, 2012).

There are a number of studies focusing on the relationship between English language proficiency and pragmatic failure (Sujana, et al., 2003; Arifuddin & Sujana, 2004; ETS Researcher, 2008; Saukah, 2010; ETS, 2012). However, none of those studies focused on pragmatic understanding of short conversations implied in Pre-TOEFL and the causes of pragmatic failure faced by the postgraduate students from diverse disciplines in the masters degree programs. This is the 'novelty' or 'authenticity' of the present study which contributes to the development of pragmatic competence and English language proficiency.

It shows that there are five primary causes of difficulty in understanding pragmatic meanings in Pre-TOEFL listening, namely, Speech Rate Delivery, Voice, Sentence Complexity (SC), Mishearing (MisH) and Colloquies (Col) (Arifuddin, et al., 2017). As a follow-up, it is essential that the draft of the listening materials and supplementary digital media

be developed. Two types of digital media are supplemented in the draft: the researcher-made media and the adopted digital audio and video media. The content of the media is based on the characteristics of each cause of the pragmatic difficulty.

So far, a listening book focusing on pragmatic understanding has not been developed. Hopefully, this book is prospective to boost the English language proficiency of the EFL master's degree students.

2 RESEARCH METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This is a multi-year Research and Development (R & D). This study employed Mixed-methods approach.

2.2 Participants

The present study employed total sampling drawn from 85 students from the four masters degree programs, English Language Education, Education Administration, Science Education and Management of the University of Mataram who have attended the TOEFL training in the orientation program held for the freshmen.

2.3 Data Collection Procedures

The present study was conducted as follows: 1) Doing a survey in order to identify and select the appropriate departments and participants. Of the seven master's degree programs of the University of Mataram, only four departments introduced TOEFL during the orientation program for the freshmen; 2) Selection of the participants; 3) Preparing and validating the research instruments; 4) Testing the pragmatic competence of the students from the four departments with Listening Part A Pre-TOEFL; 5) Data collection with the listening test.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data about pragmatic competence were analyzed with Two-way Anova, while the data collected with questionnaire and interview were analyzed with 'iterative qualitative Analysis of Yin (2011). The results of the analyses were displayed, described, explained, discussed and inferred. Based on the research findings, the final phase of the multi-year study is the development of materials and digital media for listening book (Development phase).

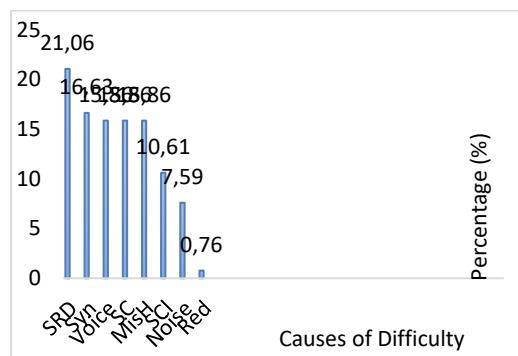
3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

The development of the teaching materials and media is the third phase of the multi-year Research and Development. The presentation of the findings of the study, five primary causes of difficulty, namely, 'Speech Rate Delivery' (SRD), 'Voice' (Voice), 'SC', 'MisH' and 'Col' aims at providing the basis for the development of the listening materials and digital media. The following are the primary causes of difficulty of pragmatic understanding of the students of the four master's degrees of the University of Mataram.

Science Education

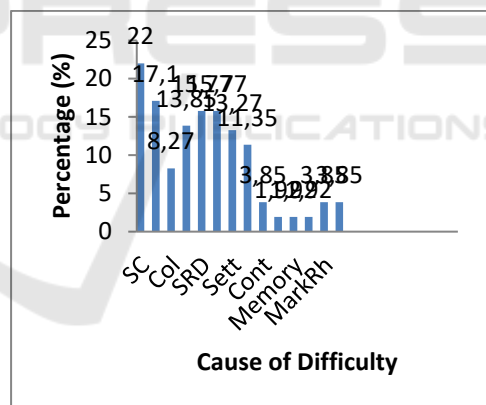
To the masters degree students of Educational Science, the primary causes of difficulty in understanding auditory pragmatic meanings are 'SRD' (21.06%), 'Synonyms' (Syn) (16.63%), 'Voice' (15.86%), 'SC' (15.86%), 'MisH' (15.86%), 'Sound Clarity' (SCL) (10.61%), and 'Noise' (Noise) (7.59%). The least cause is 'Redundancy' (Red) (0.76%).



Graph 1. Science Education

English Language Education

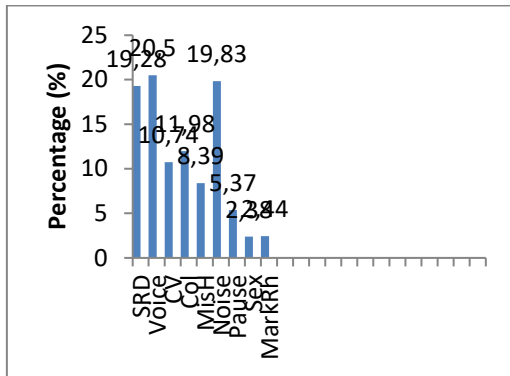
To masters degree students of English Language Education, the primary causes of difficulty in pragmatic understanding include 'SC' (22.1%), 'Voice' (17.1), 'Col' (8.27), 'MisH' (13.85), 'SRD' (15.77), 'SCI' (15.77), 'Setting' (Sett) (13.27), and 'Noise' (11.35). Two causes of difficulty do not appear, namely, 'Pause' (0%) and 'Intonation' (Int) (0%). Besides, 'Context' (Cont) (3.85), 'Reference' (1.92), 'Memory' (1.92), 'Red' (1.92), 'Rhetoric Markers' (MarkRh) (3.85) and 'Type of Questions' (3.85).



Graph 2. English Language Education

Educational Administration

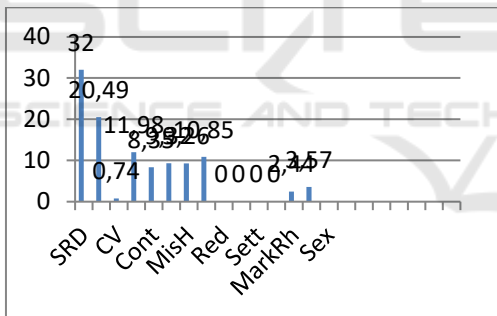
The primary causes of Causes of Difficulty of Pragmatic Understanding the Masters Degree Students of Educational Administration include 'SRD' (19.28), 'Voice' (20.5), 'Cultural Value' (CV) (10.74), 'Col' (11.98), 'MisH' (8.39), and 'Noise' (19.83). Surprisingly, four causes of difficulty do not appear, namely, 'Red', 'SCI', 'Sett' and 'Type of Questions'. In addition, 'Pause' (3.57%), 'Sex' (2.38%) and 'MarkRh' (2.44%).



Graph 3. Educational Administration

Management

The primary causes of difficulty of pragmatic understanding the Masters Degree Students of Management include ‘SRD’ (32%), ‘Voice’ (20.49%), ‘Cultural Value’ (CV) (10.74%), ‘Col’ (11.98%), ‘Context’ (Cont) (8.35%), ‘SC’ (SC) (9.32%), MisH (9.26%), and ‘Noise’(10.85%). Surprisingly, four causes of difficulty do not appear, namely, ‘Redundancy’ (Red) (0%), ‘Sound Clarity’ (SCl) (0%), ‘Setting’ (Sett) (0%), ‘Type of Questions’(0%), ‘Rhetoric Markers’ (MarkRh) (2.44%), ‘Pause’(3.57%) and ‘Sex’ (2.38 %).



Graph 4. Management

4 DISCUSSION

To the Masters Degree Students of English Language Education, one of the primary causes of difficulty is ‘Col’ (Graph 2). One of the obstacles to listening is ‘idiomatic expressions’ (Goh, 1997), a type of colloquies.

In the masters degree of Educational Administration, there are four causes of difficulty in pragmatic understanding that the students did not face, namely, ‘Redundancy’, ‘Sound Clarity’, ‘Setting’, and ‘Type of Questions’, and ‘Rhetoric Markers’ (Graph 3). Of the four masters degree

programs, there are three programs or departments which place ‘SRD’ in the first rank of cause of difficulty in understanding pragmatic meaning tested in Listening Part A Pre-TOEFL. This a ‘novel’ finding. The detail of the causes of difficulty in understanding pragmatic meaning is displayed in Graphs 1 to 4.

The top cause of their listening difficulty is ‘SRD’. This is in line with Nemati, et al.’s (2016) research finding indicating that the main listening problems of the students involves difficulty in identifying words when they listened to an audio file due to fast speech and weak at understanding vocabulary and colloquia terms.

Based on the rankings of causes of difficulty based on gender (table 1), it indicates the listening needs understanding of sentence structure. It is relevant to Nadig’s (2013) point of view stating that listening comprehension of spoken language needs understanding the syntax of sentences.

Regardless of the ranks and the obtained scores, the masters’ degree students of Language education also experienced pragmatic failure. Based on the data displayed in Graph 2, the masters’ degree students of English Language Education achieved the highest score, and the masters’ degree students of Educational Administration got the lowest mean score. Pragmatic failure frequently makes communication problems. Some researchers have demonstrated that acquiring the rules of appropriate language behavior can be difficult even for fairly advanced learners and often leading them to pragmatic failure (Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz, 1990; Bouton, 1994; Kasper & Schmidt, 1996). It means that students from all departments need extended pragmatic competence in order to avoid pragmatic failure.

One of the causes of pragmatic failure is that pragmatic issues receive relatively little attention in the language classrooms (Kreutel, 2007). Besides, grammatical competence does not facilitate them to understand pragmatic meaning due to disparities between learners’ grammatical development and pragmatic development (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987). In line with it, Bardovi-Harlig & Doernyei (1998) reported that even learners who exhibit high levels of grammatical competence may exhibit a wide range of pragmatic competence when compared with native speakers in conversations and elicited conditions. He and Yan (1986) investigated the pragmatic failure by Chinese learners of English as a foreign language and found that the learners’ pragmatic development was not proportional to their grammatical development. In

other words, pragmatic failure is also experienced by foreign language learners with high competence.

Those findings seem inconsistent with other research findings which show that there is a correlation between lexico-grammatical competence and pragmatic competence (Khamyod dan Aksornjarung, 2011). In relation to language proficiency, low pragmatic competence affects foreign language proficiency. This statement is reasonable because based on some studies on foreign language learners' pragmatic development (Yoshimi, 2001), it proved that learners receiving instruction in pragmatics outperformed those who did not. In the present study, the masters' degree students of English language Education who were enriched with pragmatic-related knowledge achieved the highest pragmatic understanding.

A study conducted by Sirikhan (2011) shows that English proficiency is a variable which has a great effect on pragmatic ability. This agrees with Taguchi (2007) who supports that language background and English proficiency have influenced L2 pragmatic processing. The findings of this study also confirm the studies of Bardovi-Harling and Dornyei (1998) in that EFL/ESL learning content, and proficiency levels, affect the ability in pragmatic and grammatical awareness. Besides, the findings of this study correspond with some previous studies (Roever, 2005) in that the high language proficient participants had better performance in pragmatics tests than the low ones. This is similar to the findings of Matsumura (2003) who reveals that the overall level of proficiency in the target language plays an important role in the acquisition of pragmatic awareness. Other studies (Hill, 1997; Roever, 2005; Yamashita, 1996) indicate that the high proficiency participants show higher pragmatic competence than those with low pragmatic competence.

A closely related study was conducted by Li (2007) which examined the relationship between the two kinds of competence of 42 Chinese English learners with different levels of proficiency (high- and low-levels) in BeiHang University. The study indicates that there is a positive relationship between linguistic proficiency and pragmatic ability. The participants with high linguistic competence have high pragmatic ability and vice versa. She argues that pragmatics can be taught, and thus it is necessary to teach students pragmalinguistics as well as sociopragmatics.

It has been widely accepted that high proficiency L2 learners are generally more competent in interpreting implied meaning than low proficiency L2 learners (Lee, 2010). As categorised as low

pragmatic EFL learners, the subjects' difficulty in understanding pragmatic meaning, including speech acts/language functions recognition, is reasonable. It has been widely accepted that high proficiency L2 learners are generally more competent in interpreting implied meaning than low proficiency L2 learners.

However, it is inconsistent with Liu's (2006) study indicating that the scores from other large-scale proficiency tests, like TOEFL and International English Language Testing System (IELTS), do not correlate with pragmatic ability. Those who have higher scores do not seem to have correspondingly high pragmatic ability. A number of studies also point out that learners of English as a foreign language, who have excellent grammatical and lexical competence of the target language, still fail to convey their messages effectively due to, for instance, the lack of social appropriateness rules and pragmatic competence (Wolfson et al, 1989). This fact could be an important input for the orientation and strategies for the improvement of English language proficiency.

Of the four masters degree programs, there are three programs or departments which place 'RD' in the first rank of cause of difficulty in understanding pragmatic meaning tested in Listening Part A Pre-TOEFL. This a 'novel' finding. The detail of the causes of difficulty in understanding pragmatic meaning is displayed in Table 1 and Table 2 and Graphs 1 to 4.

Generally, pragmatic failure relates to speech rate known as 'SRD'. Liu (2009) reports that factors that affect listening comprehension of TOEFL are, for instance, tone, intonation, pronunciation, word recognition, background knowledge and speed of delivery. To foreign language learners, understanding messages or pragmatic meanings from high speed spoken language is difficult. This is relevant with Ur's (1989:254) statement that virtually every language learner initially thinks that native speakers speak too fast. Learners will nevertheless eventually need to be able to comprehend language delivered at varying rates of speed and, at times, delivered with few pauses.

As described earlier, 'Voice', which involves intonation, stress, rhythm and the like, determine pragmatic understanding. If a foreign language learner is not accustomed to hearing the target language voices or sounds, it generally causes listening difficulty, especially if the utterances imply pragmatic meanings. For example, understanding the pragmatic meaning from two blended sounds is difficult. According to Black (2006:17), paralinguistic features, such as, intonation, stress, and the like determine the understanding of pragmatic meaning.

Understanding pragmatic meaning relies heavily on the understanding of sentence structure or grammar, for instance, ‘SC’. The finding of the present study is consistent with Arifuddin’s (2013) research finding. Another revealing point of the study was there is much stronger correlation between the lexico-grammatical and pragmatic competences of the female EFL learners than the male participants (Bulut, 2009).

The fourth rank of the causes of difficulty in pragmatic understanding is ‘Mishearing’, apart of sound or voice. ‘Mishearing’ is listening difficulty which may result from unfamiliarity with the features of particular sounds. Kostin (2004:3) argues that the unfamiliarity with the phonological aspects and limited exposure to the target language may influence listeners’ ability to comprehend conversations. Besides ‘Mishearing’, ‘Sound Clarity’ and ‘Col’ have been the primary causes of understanding pragmatic meaning from auditory language. Another cause of difficulty of the pragmatic understanding is limited knowledge of synonyms or expressions. The finding of the present study is relevant with Mei-Xia’s (2005) study indicating that unfamiliarity with synonyms and lack of vocabulary lead to pragmatic failure.

In addition, pragmatic understanding also relates to context familiarity. The finding of the present study is consistent with the statements of some scholars that familiarity with or knowledge of contextual language use contributes to foreign language learners’ pragmatic understanding (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005). Similarly, Crandall & Basturkmen (2004) also found that the use of language appropriate with context is one of the efforts to develop pragmatic competence.

Based on the research findings just discussed, the researchers designed **The Rubric of Digital Media for Pragmatic-based Pre-TOEFL Listening Book** below.

Some of the audios or videos mentioned in the rubric are online YouTube and TOEFL Listening Practice Tests. Due to the copy right regulations, the media are not reproduced, but the learners are suggested to practice listening on their own via online YouTube and TOEFL listening practice tests. In addition, this listening book is written in pdf. format, so that the audios and videos are not directly accessible. The presentation of those learning media in this book is only as a guide. The learners have to access those media from the internet (YouTube) online when practice listening. The ‘Rubric of the Digital Media for Pragmatic-based Pre-TOEFL Listening’ also containing the URLs of all audios and videos are presented.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Based on a multi-year Research and Development, it shows that there are five primary causes of difficulty in understanding pragmatic meanings in Pre-TOEFL listening, namely, Speech Rate Delivery, Voice, Sentence Complexity, Mishearing and Colloquies. As a follow-up, it is essential that the draft of the listening materials and supplementary digital media be developed. Two types of digital media are supplemented in the draft: the researcher-made media and the adopted digital audio and video media. The content of the media is based on the characteristics of each cause of the pragmatic difficulty. The research findings obtained from the research activities (Research phase) and the Rubric of the Digital Media for Pragmatic-based Pre-TOEFL Listening are the basis of the development of the book.

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