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THE EFFECT OF ORAL DICTATION AS A TEACHING TECHNIQUE ON THE LISTENING COMPREHENSION OF ELEMENTARY EFL LEARNERS

چکیده

هدف از این پژوهش بررسی تأثیر دیکته شفاهی به عنوان یک روش تدریس، بر درک شنیداری زبان آموزان ایرانی سطح مقدماتی بوده است. ابتدا از بین ۹۰ نفر زبان آموز دختر که در «مؤسسه‌ی علامه طباطبائی» بروجرد دوره‌ی مقدماتی را گذرانده بودند. ۶۰ نفر به صورت تصادفی در دو گروه ۳۰ نفری مورد بررسی و مطالعه قرار گرفتند. سپس برای حصول اطمینان از یکسان بودن مهارت زبانی زبان آموزان، تست «نلسون 100A» و همچنین برای حصول اطمینان از یکسان بودن درک شنیداری زبان آموزان، تست شنیداری گرفته شد که از همین تست‌ها به عنوان Pre-test و Post-test استفاده شد. در ادامه دو گروه شاهد و آزمایش مشخص شدند. گروه شاهد فقط در معرض تمرین‌های کتاب «Headway» بودند، ولی گروه آزمایش در کنار تمرین‌های مذکور، دیکته‌ی شفاهی را به مدت یک ترم به عنوان یک روش تدریس دریافت کردند. در پایان ترم به منظور بررسی تأثیر دیکته‌ی شفاهی روی گروه آزمایش، به هر دو گروه کنترل و آزمایش دوباره تست درک شنیداری که در Pre-test از آن استفاده شده بود، به عنوان Post-test داده شد. بعد از مقایسه و ارزش‌یابی نتایج و تعیین میانگین نمرات دو گروه کنترل و آزمایش، مشخص شد گروه آزمایش که تحت تأثیر دیکته‌ی شفاهی قرار گرفته بود، پیشرفت چشم‌گیری داشته است. بنابراین، نتیجه گرفته شد که آموزش دیکته‌ی شفاهی در پیشرفت درک شنیداری زبان آموزان بسیار مؤثر است. همچنین از این پژوهش می‌توان نتیجه‌گیری کرد که دیکته‌ی شفاهی، علاوه

بر تأثیر بر درک شنیداری، می‌تواند روش مفیدی باشد در جهت آشنا کردن زبان‌آموزان با تلفظ صحیح کلمات. بنابراین در کشوری مانند ایران که دسترسی به معلمان بومی انگلیسی وجود ندارد، دیکته‌ی شفاهی روشی است برای پیشرفت تلفظ صحیح کلمات و درک شنیداری. قابل ذکر است که از دیکته‌ی شفاهی می‌توان در تمام دوره‌های تحصیلی مقدماتی، متوسطه و پیشرفته استفاده کرد. با توجه به این که این روش در زمان (۱۵-۱۰ دقیقه) و هزینه (فقط استفاده از ضبط صوت و نوارکاست) صرفه‌جویی می‌کند و مقرون به صرفه است و در کلاس‌های نظری (تئوری) نیز می‌توان از آن بهره گرفت، پیشنهاد می‌کنیم معلمان گرامی دوره‌های راهنمایی و دبیرستان از این روش استفاده کنند.

کلیدواژه‌ها: دیکته‌ی شفاهی، درک شنیداری، فراگیران زبان.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of Dictation on Listening Comprehension ability of elementary EFL learners. In order to carry out the research, six classes of elementary EFL learners (90 subjects), who had been learning English in Allameh Tabatabai Language Institute in Boroujerd for three terms approximately 100 hours, were chosen. Two classes (30 subjects) took part in the pilot study. Then two classes (30 subjects) were randomly assigned as the experimental group and the two other were randomly assigned as the control group (30 subjects). To make sure about the homogeneity of the two groups, before the treatment, in terms of their general proficiency and listening ability in English, they were given the Nelson test and a listening test. The results revealed that they were homogeneous. Then for one term, consisting of 20 sessions, the students in the control group were just given the listening exercises in their textbook (Headway Elementary) whereas the students in the experimental group were exposed to dictation in addition to the textbook listening exercises. At the end of the term both groups were post-tested by a standard listening test which was also used as the listening pre-test. The results showed that dictation had a significant effect on the listening comprehension ability of the subjects in the experimental group.

Key Words: oral dictation, listening comprehension, language learners.

Introduction

Comprehending the spoken form of the target language is one of the most difficult tasks for language learners, yet it is probably the most neglected skill in second of foreign language teaching. This neglect stems, or course, from the objectives of much language teaching in situations where the students are not likely to encounter native speakers' but the neglect is probably most of all due to our ignorance of the nature

of the process of listening comprehension. The lack of knowledge on a theoretical level influences our decisions on what and how to teach our students to comprehend the spoken language.

Brown (1993) believes that there has been a revolution in the teaching of English in the last twenty years. In the early seventies it was still the case that spoken language was given secondary importance. Today the importance of teaching the spoken



language is universally acknowledged. Much of the energy and imaginativeness of many publishing enterprises is now poured into spoken language materials and it is taken for granted that anyone learning a foreign language needs to be able to use it for talking even though their primary need for it may still be to read or write. This trend might be the reason why understanding the spoken form of the foreign language has received increasing attention both in research and in teaching. We now have a much better understanding of the processes of comprehension and there are now many courses on offer which claim to teach listening comprehension, and there are many published books and conference papers which claim to support teachers improving their students' performance in listening comprehension and a lot of teaching techniques in this regard have been introduced. For example, Ur (1991) has presented more than thirty different types of exercises for teaching listening. Also Rost (1991) has suggested more than thirty activities with many variations.

One of the techniques for improving and testing listening comprehension which has been recommended in many books related to TEFL and especially related to teaching listening comprehension is dictation (see: Ur 1991, Davis 1995, Rost 1991, Gilbert 1981, Celce - Murcia 1996, Paulston 1976, Morley 1977). The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of dictation as a teaching technique on the listening comprehension of elementary

EFL learners.

The study was intended to answer the following research question.

Is there any significant difference between the listening comprehension ability of those elementary EFL learners who are given dictation and those who are not?

The following null hypothesis was set to be tested in the present research.

There is no significant difference between the listening comprehension ability of those elementary EFL learners who are given dictation and those who are not.

Background

Davis (1995) in his book, *Dictation*, mentions ten reasons for using dictation in ELT classes:

1. The students are active during the exercise because they have to listen very attentively to perceive and comprehend an L2/FL passage read by a native speaker.
2. The students are active after the exercise. Because after noticing their mishearings they listen more carefully. After the correction of their dictation, it is recommended that students listen for the second time to the dictated passage with special attention to their mistakes. This practice is thought to improve the time perception ability of the learners.
3. Dictation is safe for the non-native teacher. Non-native teachers can easily use the passages recorded by native speakers and in this way expose their

students to the real spoken language of native speakers' speed easily.

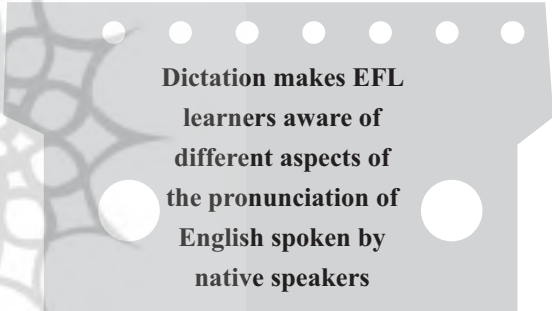
4. For English it is a technically useful exercise. Decoding the sounds of this particular language and recording them in writing is a major learning task.
5. Dictation fosters unconscious thinking.
6. Dictation leads to oral communicative activities.
7. Dictation will often calm groups.
8. Dictation copes with mixed-ability groups. All the students in the class can benefit from this exercise.
9. Dictation can be used to engage the majority of the learners. By taking something around 10-15 minutes of the class time for dictation, the teacher can engage all the students in a challenging listening exercise.
10. Dictation can make students aware of their weak points in understanding the English spoken by native speakers and therefore makes them try more to improve their listening comprehension ability.

How to Use Dictation

Dictation can take two forms, spot dictation and the dictation of a complete passage. In either case the procedures are essentially the same. First the passage is read (either by the teacher or on a tape) at normal speed as the students listen. Then the passage is repeated in "meaningful mouthfuls" with pauses for the students to write. The meaningful mouthfuls are rather short for beginning students and increase

in length as the students' auditory memory increases. The length of the pause is geared to the slower students, that everyone would have the time to write. Finally the passage is reread at normal speed so that the students can check and if necessary correct their work.

Spot dictation requires the students only to fill in the blank spaces of the written passage they have before them and therefore need not be as attentive as in writing passage dictation. In a spot dictation, the written passage, may contain structures which the students can recognize, but not necessarily



Dictation makes EFL learners aware of different aspects of the pronunciation of English spoken by native speakers

produce. Paulston continues, "complete dictation should only contain material which the students have previously studied for productive use" (pp. 135-6). In this study only dictation of a complete passage has been used.

Methodology

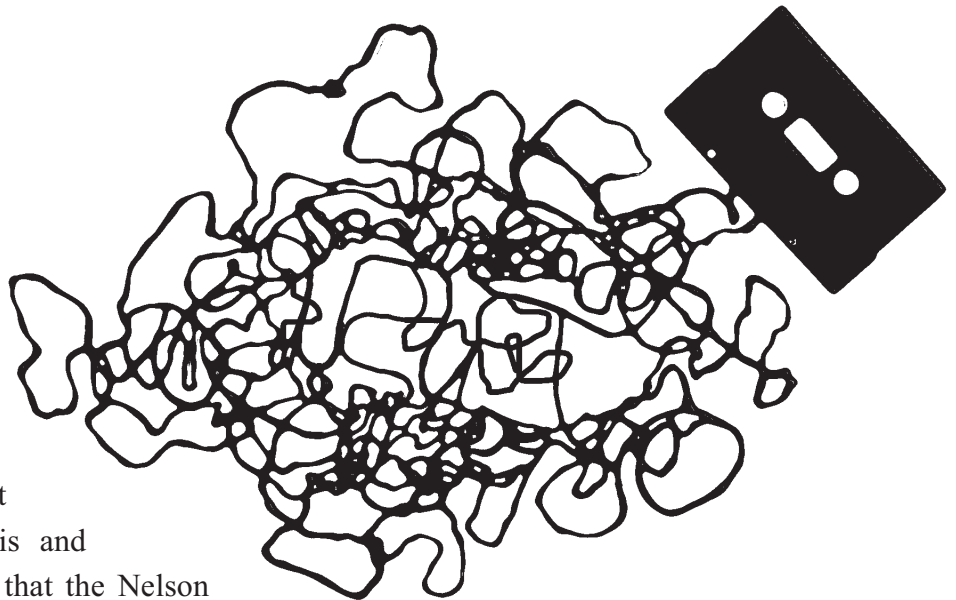
Procedure

At the beginning of one the educational terms in Allameh Tabatabai Language Institute, six classes of elementary EFL learners (90 subjects), who had been learning English in the institute for three terms approximately 100 hours, were chosen.

Two classes (30 subjects) took part in piloting the Nelson test 100A along with an elementary listening test which was used as the pre test and the post - test. The item analysis and reliability check showed that the Nelson test and the listening comprehension test were satisfactory (KR. 21: 0.74 and 0.78 for the two tests respectively). The remaining four classes (60 subjects) participated in the main study. Two classes were randomly assigned as the experimental group and the two others were randomly assigned as the control group. To make sure about the homogeneity of the two groups before the experiment, in term of their general proficiency and listening ability in English, they were given the Nelson test and the listening test. The results revealed that they were homogeneous. The F observed for the two tests were 1.20 and 1.14 respectively. Both Fs did not reach the F criterion at 0.05 level of significance.

The experimental group in addition to being exposed to the listening exercises in their textbook, Headway elementary units 6-10, were also given dictation during the term. But the two classes in the control group were exposed only to the listening exercises in their textbook. The listening exercises in the textbook were exactly the same for the two groups.

The material for giving dictation were native-recorded passages and



conversations in the subjects' textbook. The procedure followed for the treatment was like this: first students were made aware of the topic of the passage or conversation to activate their background knowledge, then they were allowed to listen once to the whole passage or conversations without any pause; then the tape was replayed and stopped after each meaningful chunk and students were asked to write down what they had heard. At the third stage, they were allowed to listen another time to the whole passage or conversations and check what they had written. At the end, they were asked to check their dictation against the tapescript in their textbook. Sometimes after checking their dictation, subjects were asked to listen to the tape again while looking at their dictation and paying special attention to their mistakes.

The subjects in the experimental group were given dictation during the twenty-session term which lasted nearly one month, because students would come to class five days in a week. The passages and conversations used for dictation were short, having around 100 words, and each

dictation would take around 10-15 minutes. While taking dictation, the class was quiet and the quality of the tape and the cassette player was faultless.

At the end of the term, the listening comprehension test which had also been used to pre-test the listening comprehension ability of the two groups (the experimental and the control group) was given to the two groups again to investigate the effect of dictation on the listening comprehension ability of the subjects in the experimental group.

Results

After giving dictation to the subjects in the experimental group in a twenty-session term, both groups (experimental and control) were post-tested by the same listening comprehension test which was also used for the listening comprehension pre-test.

As can be seen in table 1 the calculated mean and standard deviation for the experimental group were 68.58 and 10.39 and for the control group, they were 62.00 and 10.20 respectively. The T-observed (2.48) exceeded the t-critical(2.00) and so the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 1. T-test result for the post-test scores (the group statistics related to the listening comprehension post-test of the two groups)

Groups	N	\bar{X}	SD	T-observed
GE	30	68.582	10.395	2.48
GC	30	62.000	10.201	

$P < 0.05$ $df = [(n_1 - 1) + (n_2 - 1)] = 58$ $t\text{-critical} = 2.00$

Based on this result it can be concluded that the treatment received by the experimental group during the term, was effective, and served the intended purpose. The students who received the dictation as a teaching technique did much better on the post-test compared with the students who were just exposed to the listening exercises in their textbook.

Discussion

As mentioned earlier, the aim of this study was to investigate the effect of dictation on listening comprehension ability of EFL elementary learners and it was shown that dictation had a significant effect on the listening comprehension ability of the experimental group.

There are some probable reasons for the significant effect of dictation on the listening comprehension ability of the experimental group.

- One of the probable reasons that dictation has had a significant effect on the listening comprehension ability of the experimental group is that the subjects in this group had been forced to listen more attentively to decode the foreign speech. As an EFL teacher, the researchers have used dictation as a listening exercise along with other types of listening exercises in their classes. Their informal observations show that none of other listening exercises can make learners as much attentive as dictation does; and it is obvious that the more attentive the EFL learners listen to the foreign language, the sooner their listening



Using Dictation to make students aware of different aspects of pronunciation and the sound system of English has been recommended both by Kenworthy (1990) and Celce-Murcia (1996)

comprehension ability improves.

- Another probable cause can be the effect of dictation on the short term memory of the subjects, because in dictation they had to keep chunks of meaningful speech in their mind in order to be able to then write them on paper. To the researchers' observations, this is very challenging for EFL learners and they think it is a very good exercise to make the students see the relationship between different words or chunk of speech to decode the foreign language and understand the whole meaning of a conversation or passage.

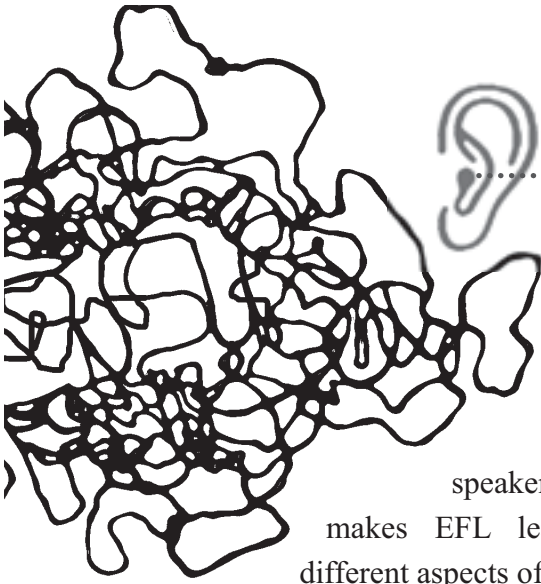
- Another justification is that dictation makes the learners aware of the difficulties of understanding English spoken by native speakers in comparison with the English spoken by Iranian EFL teachers. Native speakers' English is quite different from Iranian EFL teachers' English in terms of some aspects of pronunciation including pronunciation of some sounds, rhythm, sentence stress, weak forms (reduced pronunciations of some words), intonation, and linkage of words together. One of the exercises which is recommended to make EFL learners aware of these aspects of pronunciation is dictation by using native-recorded speech (See Kenworthy 1990). When Iranian elementary learners are

given dictation for the first time, most of them may not recognize some words and phrases such as: *but, some, can, both, not at all*; but after checking their dictation with the tapescript and listening again to the tape they notice the difference between the pronunciation of these words by their teacher and the native speaker on the tape and after that they ask for explanations about these differences. Informal observations show that in classes where students are not given dictation they rarely notice these differences. So most possibly, this awareness of the differences created by dictation, has had a role in helping the subjects in the experimental group to do better on the listening comprehension post-test.

Conclusion and Implications

This study has shown that dictation can have a positive significant effect on listening comprehension ability of elementary EFL learners and so it is suggested that EFL teachers use this technique in their classes.

One point is that in some countries like Iran in which students do not have access to native English speakers, EFL teachers can make use of this technique to make their students quite familiar with the English spoken by native speakers. Because in EFL students are only exposed to English spoken by Iranian EFL teachers or some other listening exercises which do not force them to listen very attentively, later even after learning enough grammar and



vocabulary students can not understand native English speakers easily. Dictation makes EFL learners aware of different aspects of the pronunciation of English spoken by native speakers. So most possibly it both affects their listening comprehension ability and their pronunciation. Using Dictation to make students aware of different aspects of pronunciation and the sound system of English has been recommended both by Kenworthy (1990) and Celce-Murcia (1996).

Dictation can be easily used in different kinds of EFL Classes: elementary, intermediate, advanced; adolescent or adult; male or female; homogeneous or heterogeneous; large or small, etc. It is quite practical; all is needed is getting some suitable native recorded tapes (considering the students level, most of the time just the tapes accompanied by student textbooks are enough) and a cassette player. It does not take much of the class time and it engages all the students in the class with a challenging listening exercise. Just one point that should be mentioned here is that students should not be given long dictation, because as Rost (1991) insists, dictation is a very useful exercise but if students are forced to write too much it becomes tedious.

Dictation can also help EFL students

improve their auditory memory, because while they are given dictation they have to keep meaningful chunks of speech in their mind till they write it on paper. Having a stronger auditory memory is very helpful in understanding foreign language speech because students after perceiving the message should be able to keep it in their auditory memory till it can be processed.

Dictation cannot only be used as a listening exercise but it can also be used as a listening test (see Farhady 1995 and Celce-Murcia 1996). Even it can be used as a general English proficiency test (see Oller 1979). This shows the pedagogic potential of dictation as a teaching and testing device.

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