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A Study on the Ability of the Eighth Year Students of SMP N 9 Pekanbaru in Listening to Descriptive Text

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This research was intended to know the ability of the eighth year students of SMPN 9 Pekanbaru in listening to descriptive text. Before began the research, the researcher conducted a try out test to know the test was valid and realiable . The try out test consisted of 40 items, and the number of the students that joined the test was 35. After analyzing the try out data and made necessary revision, she gave the test to the sample of this research. The sample were the eighth year students, particulary VIII.2 and VIII.7 that consisted of 69 students. This research started on February 5, 2013 and ended on April 16,2013.

The writer concluded that the ability of the eighth year students in listening to descriptive text was poor to average level. It was clearly proven by the result of the data analysis shows that the mean score for all the sample was 44.57. Moreover, the detail of the data shows that no one of the students (0%) at good to excellent level, 6 students (8,70%) were at average to good level, 37 students (53,62%) were poor to average level, and 26 students (37,68%) were at poor level. It means that more than a half of students were at poor to average level in listening to descriptive text.

Keywords : *listening ability, descriptive text*

INTRODUCTION

According to the English school based curriculum for Junior high school students, the students are supposed to learn some language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. According to the standard of competency, there are some of texts that should be learned by students. Such as: narrative, descriptive, recount, news item, spoof , prosedure and explanation. In part of listening for the eighth year students are expected to comprehend the meaning of short functional text and short monolog in descriptive and recount text to make interaction with surrounding. In addition, the basic competency states that the students have to be able to give response to short monolog text in detail, fluent, and accurate in descriptive and recount text. In accordance to the standard and the basic competency of listening described above, there are some indicators that should be achieved by students. The indicator states that the students should be able to identify the information or meaning of descriptive and recount text. Then, the students are able to identify the communicative purpose and steps of rethorical of descriptive and recount texts.

Based on the writer's interview with three English teachers of SMPN 9 Pekanbaru who teach English to eighth year students, the writer found some phenomena that happened in the teaching and learning process of listening. One of the English teachers said that listening was included in teaching English in this school but the time allocation in a week depends on the condition and there was no fix schedule. According to her, she taught listening in English class because she had fulfill the curriculum for listening requirement, and at the same time it will enable students to improve all the language skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Moreover, the teacher said that she did not face difficulties in teaching listening because she thought that she had enough materials and more knowledge various strategies in teaching listening. She taught all the four language skills including listening in English class. She said that she always tried to teach listening event though the class atmosphere was not conducive for listening activities.

Meanwhile, the other two English teachers stated that there were some problems related to the teaching of listening although they also regarded listening as an important skill to teach. However, they did not teach listening. They said that listening was not included. To the writer's knowledge, this happened because of two possible factors. First, the condition

for teaching listening was not conducive for the location of school was so close to the street that makes the teaching and learning process ineffective. Therefore, a good condition was importantly considered to support the students in listening activities. Second, actually SMP N 9 Pekanbaru has an English laboratory but the teachers seldom uses it. They thought that they didn't have capability to operate the facilities there. Besides, they also had a lack of resources or references, such as cassettes or CD to support the process of teaching and learning listening.

Based on the phenomena described above, it can be said that most of the students did not learn listening because only one out of the three teachers taught listening to the eighth year students. Consequently, the students performance in English achievement did not portray their ability in listening. Considering this fact, there is a question, "what is the students' ability in listening?".

To find out the scientific answer to this question, the writer conducted a research entitled "*A Study on the Ability of the Eighth Year Students of SMP N 9 Pekanbaru in Listening to Descriptive Text*".

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Definitons of Listening

Listening is something that we do every day. Listening seems to simple but when listening in a second or foreign language, we can see more easily how complex listening really is. There are some definitions of listening. Helgesen (2003) states listening is an active, purposeful processing of making sense of what he hear. It means, listeners are actively paying attention and working on understanding and interpreting what they hear because every word or sentence has a meaning itself. In addition, "listening is the mental process of constructing meaning from spoken input" (Rost, 2002) in Helgesen (2007). It means, listening is the process of understanding the meanings of words or sentences that speakers produce. The listener should have the ability to understand the words or the sentences of the speakers.

Furthermore, (Rubin,1995) mentions that listening is conceived of as an active process in which select and interpret information which comes from auditory and visual clues in order to define what is going on and what the speakers are trying to express. Rubin states that active listening means listeners get information from visual and auditory clues and relate this

information to what they already know. Then, select means that in the process of making sense of the input, listeners use only part of the incoming information, and interpret means that in trying to make sense of the input, listener use their background knowledge as well as the information to decipher what is going on and to figure out what speakers intend. In accordance to the definitions for listening all use words like ‘active ‘ and ‘construct’. It means that the listener is doing more than simply decoding what is heard.

In language teaching, listening and reading can be classified as receptive skills, this is in contrast with speaking and writing can be included into productive skills. (Saricoban,1999) states that the receptive skills used in language acquisition: listening and reading enable the productive skills: speaking and writing . It means listening precedes speaking and reading precedes writing.

An essential concept in teaching listening, we should also consider about the differences between listening and hearing. Are you listening or just hearing? When we are hearing, listener took in a bit information, held it in a sort of medium-term memory. But when listening is much complex more than hearing. Listener are actively paying attention and working on understanding and interpreting what they hear. So the differences between listening and hearing depend on how much attention you are paying to something.

Listening also has distinction between reciprocal listening and non-reciprocal listening. Reciprocal listening is between the people. When we have conversations, we listen to each other, add our ideas and give feedback. Non- reciprocal listening is the kind of listening we are familiar with from language classes. Example, the teacher plays an audio recording and students do a task, or the teacher dictates and students write.

According to Underwood (1989) there are some possible situations / reasons for listening:

1. Listening to live conversation in which one takes no part
2. This is usually referred to as ‘ eavesdropping’. A person may find him/ herself listening to a conversation because something in what is being said attracts his/her attention and make him/her want to hear more.
3. Listening to announcements
This listening activity is at the airport, railways situations, etc where the listener is interested almost exclusively in extracting or confirming the relevant information whilst more and less ignoring the rest of the utterance.

4. Listening to news, weather, etc. on TV or radio, where the objective is again to extract clearly stated information, for example main items. But for the others are only interested in one or two of the topics covered will pay little or no attention to the other items.
5. Listening to radio or TV for entertainment
The listener often has very limited knowledge of what is going to be said or who is going to make utterance.
6. Watching a film in a cinema
It is where the viewer is again an outsider, but can see facial expressions, gestures, etc more clearly than in the theatre.
7. Listening to records
Where the sound of music might interfere with the sounds of the words, but the rhythm, and perhaps the rhyme of the lyrics, sometimes help the listener to predict what will come next.
8. Following a lesson in a class
It is where the listener may need to grasp the concepts and to distinguish between main and subsidiary ideas.
9. Listening to a lecture/ teacher
The objective is simply to listen and try to understand the content of the lectures or teacher, although on many occasions retention of the content is also required and so listener take notes to which they can refer later.
10. Listening to someone giving a public address
It is where the listener is often as interested in the views and attitude of the speaker as in the actual topic being spoken about.

In conclusion, listening is one of the important skills that should be considered in learning English. Listening is the ability to identify and understand spoken language. This activity involves the process of understanding that speaker says. The listener should have the ability in constructing the meaning of word or sentence which they hear by speakers.

James (1984) explains about several integral components of the language skills. According to him listening consists of the following components :

1. The sonic realization

The sonic aspect of listening involves the actual physical 'Hearing' of language. Disregarding impairment of language, just about anybody recognizing human speech sound as language and can distinguish such sounds from other.

2. The segmental/supra segmental form

This leads to segmental and super segmental form. One of major requirements of meaningful second language listening is the ability to distinguish the phonemes of the language. Many dialogues in the text books have at least this in mind, namely to introduce and practice the individual sounds and the sounds pattern of the language.

3. The musical pitch and rhythm

The musical pitch and rhythm are harder to pin down. They involve not only determining that there is a difference between the sounds and it's pronounced. Rather than they refer to the fact that speaker changes important information about they speak by the way they speak.

4. The lexical phrasing

Lexical phrasing means that the certain words and phrases encoded in a particular order to get the message across. It is not enough to say according to grammar of the language words and phrases have to be arranged in a certain way. Within the limits word order can be flexible.

5. The purpose of the messages

It is intended by the speakers and the actualization of the message in the listener. Speakers speak because they have something to say (purpose) and listeners listen because they want or need to react to what speakers speak (experiences).

Listening Comprehension

Listening comprehension is the process of understanding speech in the first or second language. The study of listening comprehension in second language learning focuses on the role of individual linguistic units e.g. phonemes, words, and grammatical structures as well as the role of the listener expectations, the situation and context, background knowledge and topic (Richard and Schmidt, 2002) as quoted by Helgesen (2007).

In listening comprehension, there are two processes bottom-up and top-down up processing (Rumelhart, 1977; Flowerdew and Miller, 2005) in Helgesen (2007) . First, bottom-up processing is trying to make some sense of what we hear by focusing on different

parts; the vocabulary, the grammar or functional phrases, sound, etc. Second, top-down processing starts with background knowledge called schema. In addition, based on Lingzhu (2003) Top-down processing is very important in listening comprehension. In our native language, we do not listen to the speaker word by word, and we are sometimes one step ahead of the speaker. Our students' cognitive level is quite high, and they are quite strong in comprehension. The only problem is that their English is not very good. Using top-down activities can quickly help them to transfer their mother tongue listening strategies into English listening. Activating prior knowledge is crucial in top-down processing.

Helgesen and Brown (2007) explains about listening comprehension question : (1) listening for specific information/literal comprehension. It means that the learners need to be able to get information from the listening material. The technique that used for the students are focuses on literal comprehension and form of language; (2) listening for gist is reorganizing information which is task is to have learners listen to a segment and number of picture or items based on what they hear; (3) inferencing, it happens in the middle of listening tasks design for some other purpose; (4) listening and making evaluation, students respond to information that is implied but not directly stated; and (5) appreciation, students give an emotional or image-based response.

However, Nunan (1999) states there are eight types of listening comprehension question, they are : (1) listening for gist ; (2) listening for purpose ; (3) listening for main idea ; (4) listening for inference ; (5) listening for specific information ; (6) listening for phonemic distinctions ; (7) listening for tone / pitch to identify speaker's attitude ; and (8) listening for stress.

Then, King and Stanley in Lesmana (2010) have another idea about listening comprehension questions that are asked to listener, such as : (1) topic / main idea, topic is the gist of a passage; the central thought; the chief topic of a passage expressed or implied in a word or phrase; the topic sentence of a paragraph; a statement in sentence form which gives the stated or implied major topic of a passage and the specific way in which the passage is limited content or reference. Gist questions may ask the listeners what the subject, topic, or main idea of passage is ; (2) detail, according to Sharpe (2007) a detail problem asks the listener to answer a question about a specific point in the passage and detail can be a referent ; (3) inference, it is called as something are not stated but they can be understood

through details which are stated or through general knowledge. According to Sharpe (2007) an inference is a logical conclusion based on evidence ; (4) restatement / conclusion, it is the way to say something again or to say something in a different way but still has the same meaning. Then, conclusion is the final result from one text or one sentence that describes the text.

Listening comprehension is an active process where the listener should know what the topic, meaning of the talk and so forth. Therefore, the listener should use their brain and their basic knowledge for listening comprehensively. Below are strategies for listening comprehension stated by Lazzari and Peters (1980) :

1. Preferential Seating- the student should sit close and face the speaker.
2. Reduce Distractions – this should be done especially when teaching new concepts or giving instructions.
3. Clear simple directions – the teacher should speak slowly and with a minimum amount of words
4. Visual aids – overheads, videos, pictures, graphic organizers, etc should be used.
5. Increased students response time – allow the student to have extended time to answer questions.
6. Have student repeat the instruction – have the student repeat the direction aloud (fade silently). Ask ‘ what are you going to do?’
7. Use W H questions – use questions like who, what, where, when, why. How and how much.
8. Awareness of auditory exhaustion – keep lesson to maximum of 20 minutes in the beginning of the day while varying instructional strategies. Students learn best when taught in the morning.
9. Paraphrase instruction – present the information and direction in a different way every day.

Gabler and Scholnick (2003) give different ideas about how to improve listening comprehension. According to him the students need to use good attack strategies : (1) using what you have already know ; (2) scanning for the main idea ; (3) scanning for the important points ; (4) inferencing (making intelligence guesses) ; (5) scanning for specific pieces of information ; (6) using structure and intonation clues.

According to the experts described above, the writer chooses some of the types of listening comprehension that will be applied in this research. They are listening for specific information by Nunan (1999), here the students should be able to get information. Then, listening for detail by Sharpe that the students should know and can answer the specific point from the listening material that will be given.

Thaine (2010) discuss about macro and micro skills in listening. The micro skills attending to the smaller bits and chunks of language, in more of bottom-up process. Macro skills focusing on the larger elements involved in a top-down approach (Rumelhart, 1977).

a) Micro Skills:

1. Discriminate among the distinctive sounds of English.
2. Recognize English stress patterns, words in stressed and unstressed positions, rhythmic structure, intonation contours, and their role in signaling information.
3. Recognize reduced forms of words.
4. Distinguish word boundaries, recognize a core of words, and interpret word order patterns and their significance.
5. Recognize cohesive devices in spoken discourse.
6. Process speech at different rates of delivery.
7. Process speech containing pauses, errors, corrections, and other performance variables.
8. Recognize grammatical word classes (noun, verbs, etc.) system (e.g., tense, agreement, pluralization) patterns, rules and elliptical forms.
9. Detect sentence constituents and distinguish between major and minor constituents.
10. Recognize that a particular meaning may be expressed in different grammatical forms

b) Macro Skills :

1. Recognize the communicative functions of utterances, according to situations and goals.
2. Infer situations and goals using real-world knowledge.
3. Find connections between events, deduce causes and effects.

4. Detect such relations as main idea, supporting idea, new information, given information, generalization, and exemplification.
5. Distinguish between literal and implied meaning.
6. Use facial, kinesthetic, body language, and other nonverbal clues to decipher meanings.
7. Develop and use a variety of listening strategies, such as detecting key words, guessing the meaning from context, appealing for help, and signaling comprehension or lack thereof.

In this research, the writer combines macro and micro listening skills. Micro skills divide into some aspects, but the writer chooses one of them, that is discriminate among distinctive sounds of English or can be called individual sound. Then, in macro skills, the writer also chooses some of them, such as find connection between events, deduce causes and effect or reference, detect such relations as new information that can be called specific information, and develop and use a variety of listening strategies, such as detecting key words and guessing the meaning from context or the students' knowledge about vocabulary that will be applied in this research.

The Application of Teaching Listening

A listening lesson often has three parts : (1) pre-listening, in pre-listening, the students need to warm up before doing an exercise. A pre-listening warm – up task is more than just instruction to the topic, although that aspect of it is important. Pre-listening is how we can help learner achieve the balance between top-down and bottom-up processing. In many warm-up activities. Learners do tasks to reminding themselves of content related to what that will hear as well as vocabulary and times, forms that will carry the content ;(2) listening task, traditional listening materials often had learners listen to a text in teaching listening, any listening passage is referred to as a text. After the students listen, they answer some questions. Generally, listening tasks are completed as the students listen. Using tasks when teaching listening to imply the purpose of listening ; (3) post listening, the range of post-listening activities is at least as wide as listening tasks themselves. At times, post-listening may be as simple as checking the answer to some questions, either by the teacher telling the learners what the correct answer are, by eliciting answers from the students themselves, or by having students compare their answer in pairs or small groups. Post listening activities very often are speaking task.

Actually, three parts here should be applied in the process of teaching listening by teacher. But in fact, based on the writer's observation, the teachers of SMPN 9 Pekanbaru seldom use pre-teaching procedure. They tends to teach directly to listening task and post listening activities in teaching listening

Nunan in Helgesen (2007) points out, any teaching task is also potentially an assessment task. Assessment tasks is that there should be a means to give feedback to students. At the beginning level , like for junior high school the learners are often asked discrete test items, cloze activities, and dictation.

Discrete test items is the typical discrete items are about individual sound (Did he say *ship* or *sheep*?) grammatical items, or words. They are beginning learners, they can only handle word-level or below understanding. Discrete item tests are often in a multiple-choice format. Students are asked to listen a sentence and then choose one of alternatives choice. Then, cloze activities ask the students fill in the blank in a text. Sometimes the text is a summary of what they have heard, sometime individual sentences. At last, dictation is a familiar techniques the teacher reads sentences or a text and the learners write what they hear.

In this research, the writer chooses the types of the test is discrete test which be prepared in a multiple choice format and the writer will use some test items that relate to: (1) individual sound; (2) specific information; (3) vocabulary; (4) reference.

The Definitions of Descriptive Text

According to Larson (1984) a descriptive text is a text which list the characteristics of something. A descriptive text also has a generic structure. They are identification and description. Identification means the introduction of subject or the thing will be describe or identifying phenomenon to be describe. While, description means to informing or describing of the characteristic of the subject, such as the psychology aspect, behavior, physically appearance, special features, quality and etc. In addition, Hartono (2005), a descriptive text also has the language features, such as; the use of simple present tense, the focus on specific participants, the identification processes and the classification of nominal groups..

There are some aspects of descriptive text that should be learned by students. In accordance to the indicators of syllabus of listening for the eighth year students of junior high school, the students should be able to identify the information or meaning of descriptive text.

Then, the students are able to identify the communicative purpose and steps of rethorical in descriptive text. It means, the students should be able to understand what is descriptive text and the examples of descriptive text itself. And then, the students also should know what are the vocabularies which related to the text and find the meaning of vocabularies. So, based on the indicators described above, that is all the aspects that should be learned by students in descriptive text.

In short, according to the syllabus of listening for the eighth year students of junior high school, the writer will consider the aspects of descriptive text that should be known by students. So that, the writer prepares the tests for students that related with syllabus. Like the students should find the specific information and know the vocabularies from the listening material that will be given by the writer in this research.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is descriptive study which focuses on one variable. Gay (1990) states that a descriptive research involves collecting data to test or to answer questions concerning the current status of the subject of the study. This research is aimed at finding out the students' ability in listening to descriptive texts. The research was carried out at SMPN 9 on Jalan Harapan Raya Pekanbaru and the test was given on April 2013.

In conducting the research, the writer took the eighth year students of SMPN 9 Pekanbaru as the population of the research. The writer choosed them based on the following considerations; (a) the eighth year students have learned descriptive texts when they were studying at the first year students, (b) according to the school based curriculum, the eighth year students have learned descriptive text

The number of population was 329 students, Among them two classes are chosen as the sample. The writer used purposive sampling technique. Then, the writer designed a set of listening test as the research instruments. This text then was given to the sample in order to know the level of their listening ability.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Before administrating the real test, the writer conducted a try out test in order to know if the test was valid and realiable. After analyzing the try out data based on the scale of

difficulty level (0.30 – 0.70), the writer found that nine items were rejected and need to be revised. In addition, before computing standard deviation, the writer made discrimination index table to know that the score for all the items were a good test.

A test must be reliable as a measuring instrument in order to have a valid data. Before finding the reliability of the test, the writer calculated the mean score and the standard deviation of the try out data. The mean score of the try out data was 44.86 and the standard deviation of the test was 13.83. Then, after finding the mean score and the standard deviation of the try out data, the writer calculated the reliability score of the test. The reliability of the try out test was 0.99 , it means the test of this research was excellent.

After revising the try out test, then the writer gave the test to the sample of this research. In detail, the writer classified the questions based on the four components to know the ability of the students in listening to descriptive text. They are individual sound, specific information, vocabulary and reference. In term individual sound, the student's ability in finding individual sound in average to good level. In term specific information, the level of the students' ability in finding specific information is at poor level. Then, in term vocabulary, the students' score in finding vocabulary is more centralized to poor level and in term reference, the students' score in finding reference also lean towards one level ability. The greatest percentage goes to poor level. In short, the students' ability in the four components of listening comprehension questions in listening to descriptive text falls into poor level, except for finding individual sound which falls into average to good level.

The result of the data analysis shows that the mean score for all the sample that is 44.57 or belongs to poor to average. The percentage of the students in good to excellent level is 0%. In the average to good level is 8.70% or six(6) students. Then, the percentage of the students in poor to average level is 53.62% or equal to thirty-seven (37) students. At last, in poor level is 37.68% or twenty-six (26) students. Therefore, from the result of the calculation, the students' ability in listening to descriptive text is at *poor to average* level

Based on the explanation above, it can be seen that the students' ability in listening to descriptive text in this research falls into poor to average level. It can be concluded that listening to descriptive text for the eighth year students of SMPN 9 Pekanbaru is difficult.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the result of the data analysis in chapter IV, the writer draws some conclusions : (1) The mean score of the students who did the test is 44,57. It means that the ability of the eighth year students of SMPN 9 Pekanbaru in listening to descriptive text is at poor to average. It leads to an interpretation that many of the students still have problems listening to descriptive text ; (2) For each components of the questions, the mean score of the students' ability for finding individual sound is 67,19 (average to good level), finding specific information is 38,34 (poor), finding vocabulary is 23,01 (poor) and reference is 25,44 (poor). So, based on the mean score that students got, the writer can conclude that the students' ability in listening to descriptive text in finding individual sound is the easiest component (average to good level). However, finding vocabulary is the most difficult component for the eighth year students in listening to descriptive text; (3) The detail of the data shows no one of the students (0%) at good to excellent level, 6 students (8,70%) are at average to good level, 37 students (53,62%) are poor to average level, and 26 students (37,68%) are at poor level from the number of the students was 69.

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