

Hindrances met by EFL Sudanese Tertiary Students in Listening Comprehension

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Abstract

This paper attempted to explore the hindrances that contribute to the problems of AlMughtaribeen University students come across in English listening comprehension. It evaluates whether the hindrances are connected with the native speaker's speech or not. It determines which specific hindrance poses the most difficult for the students. The study adopted a descriptive method. The subject of the study was a group of first-year English students at AlMughtaribeen University in Sudan. The study sample consists of eighty students who took the listening course at College of Languages. Data was gathered by a questionnaire. The researcher used a statistical package for social studies (SPSS package), by using frequencies, percentages, tables, figures, descriptive statistics, standard deviation, one sample T-test, and one-way analysis of variance. The results of the study confirmed that AlMughtaribeen University students face listening hindrances whenever they are engaged in listening activities. Furthermore, the current study determined the students' listening hindrances that came out from the lack of exposure to native speakers. The study showed that the fast speech of native speaker and his / her pronunciation were posed the most challenged for the students when they are engaged in listening exercises. The researcher recommended that this problem needs to draw instructors' attention to train the students on listening learning strategies to improve their language skills.

Keywords: EFL students; EFL Instructors; hindrances; listening comprehension.

1- INTRODUCTION

In fact, English syllabuses of basic and secondary schools of the Sudanese educational system do not incorporate Listening skills. Therefore, tertiary students do not learn the techniques and strategies of listening skills at the earlier stages of English language learning. The students in these stages are not exposed enough to English educational media programs in which the native speakers of the target language present English activities that can improve students listening skills. When these students join the tertiary levels they find the listening skills as a new and problematic subject for learning English.

2. STATEMENT OF THE STUDY PROBLEM

From the researcher's experience of teaching English language listening. A large number of students who enroll in the English Department of Sudanese Universities have serious deficiencies in listening comprehension. This is especially observable when the students take the listening courses at the first-year level. The researcher observed that many students performed poorly in activities. This paper will, therefore, undertake the listening hindrances relevant to the native speaker's speech.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

The objective of this paper is to find out which particular hindrance poses more difficulty for AlMughtaribeen University students at the College of Languages in listening activities.

4. QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY

This paper aims to answer the question of which particular hindrance poses the most difficulty for AlMughtaribeen University students in Sudan?

5. THE HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

Based on the paper question, the researcher formulated the following assumption: Many of these hindrances pose the most difficulty for AlMughtaribeen University students in listening activities.

6. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Students will be aware of the hindrances which contribute to their difficulties in listening; when the students as listeners know something about their own problems, they will be able to improve their listening practices and become better listeners.

This study will encourage decision-makers to incorporate listening skills in the earlier stages of learning English in Sudan. Listening skills supplementary materials may be appropriate for Basic and Secondary schools.

7. THE LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The paper will be restricted to first-year English language students, College of Languages at AlMughtaribeen University in Sudan during the period of 2018/19.

8. LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper reviews the prospective factors that are claimed to affect the students' listening. Then, a previous study conducted on listening in general.

8.1 Familiarity with spoken features of English

Ur (1984) describes that non-native students who are unfamiliar with the accurate features of spoken language will have a problem in perceiving aspects of listening, for example, understanding different accents, stress, and intonation, hearing the sounds, and redundancy under informal vocabulary. He indicates that the spoken features of the native speaker can be challenging for EFL students who do not have prior exposure.

The role of the listener in a listening process is to distinguish units, to perceive and to break out the essential sounds from the ongoing stream.

Underwood (1989) says the problems may be caused by the weird sounds that are uncommon to the L2 listeners. Some sounds in English used to cause confusions especially, for the students who are unfamiliar to the speech of native speakers when they learned English at lower levels. The sound can interfere with the foreign learner's appropriate understanding of spoken English and has its effect on listening comprehension. Underwood states that students who have been left to gain intuitively more detailed knowledge through exposure to a large number of native speakers are aware of such problems. From this point, we can deduce that the students who are not familiar with such features of target language may not succeed to comprehend spoken text while the students who maintained familiarity with spoken features of English language are efficient listeners.

In fact, many listening activities in our schools and universities in Sudan are not supported with recordings. As well as our educational institutes do not have enough recordings of native speaker that train the students to gain rightly the various sounds stress and intonation patterns. On the other hand, the listening exercises that provide the students practice in recognizing the various sounds, sound-combinations, stress, and intonations are scarcely presented in our English textbooks. These exercises provide the students' practice 'listening for perception'. Perhaps, this may be one of the hindrances that have a powerful effect on the students listening comprehension and makes the spoken feature of native speech unfamiliar to our students.

Partridge (2006) has classified the discrepancies between spoken and written English into eight aspects, namely spontaneity, nominalization, lexical density, contextualization, explicitness, continuum view, repetition- hesitation and redundancy, and grammatical intricacy. If we have a look at Sudanese students, some of them are unable to know the difference between the spoken and the written form, which is a part of the normal feature of the language. When the students learn a new word, they may fail to join the sounds that they hear with words they have seen and identified in their printed form if they have no experience in listening. Then, they may find the entire experience difficult to understand and discouraging.

For example, silent letters are not often pronounced, as in the 's' in 'Island', because there are no silent letters in written Arabic. Moreover, (Hassan, 2014) observes that in silent (GH) the students may encounter an obstacle because written (GH) has no sound of its own, so it is never pronounced as it is written e.g. (GH), but it is pronounced as /g/ in some words as ghost, Ghana, and in other words pronounced as /f/ e.g. enough, cough and silent in some other words such as thorough, night. Any time the students meet such words they will be confused to pronounce them in a way that is accurate. They just guess the pronunciation by looking at the spelling of the word unless they have the prior background. Therefore the relationship between the orthography and the phonology in English is not easy for foreign students to distinguish. This is another listener hindrance that causes failure to comprehend listening. As stated by (Peltekov, P. 2017) Listeners with definite experience, background, and natural aptitude may be more successful than others at understanding L2 speech. For instance, familiarity with a specific L2 accent may help in the understanding of speakers with that accent.

8.2 Characteristic of the speaker's utterance

The process in which the students build meaning out of the information given by the speaker to understand spoken English is considered as a complicated process. If the listener fails to understand the speaker's message, it may result from bad communication skills, speaking style and unfamiliar feature of the L2 speech of native speakers. In addition, accent familiarity is another hindrance that affects listeners to understand spoken language. For example, Anderson-Hsieh and Koehler (1988) find that a faster speaking rate had a huge negative effect on listening comprehension for native listeners when the speech was produced by a non-native speaker rather than a native speaker. These outcomes suggest that when the accent of the speaker is less familiar, L1 listening comprehension will be more affected by the speech rate.

Perception in listening involves the recognition of sound signals by the listener as words or meaningful chunks of language (Anderson, 1995). The sound perception related to the speech characteristics of the native speakers can be made difficult because of

various characteristics of the spoken feature of the language. Ur (1984) claims that perception of sounds is made challenging by different pronunciations of words across versions of the same language, for example, Indian, British and Australian. Furthermore, she writes that perception of sound is made difficult by the different rhythms and tone patterns in the L2 compared with the rhythms and tone patterns in the learner's native language.

The learners' past experience of learning is considered as one of the obstacles that make challenging to comprehend a native speaker. In order to support this point, I would like to mention an example from my own past experience as a student of EFL learning at Secondary School in Sudan. Our Sudanese teacher's speech was characterized by understandable pronunciation and slow rate of delivery. He used these strategies of the spoken feature in the class in order to make his message more obvious to the students, and I was accustomed to our teacher's accent. At that time, I was not used to hearing different accents. Later on, when I come across the pronunciation of the native speakers which characterized by the fast rate of delivery, the unstructured language with incomplete sentences and false starts, it may be difficult for me to understand the listening text. The speed of the speech and the pronunciation of the speaker, intonation are the main problems. For this reason, Underwood (1989) asserts that using non-authentic texts for the teaching of listening causes students to create another problem of having to try transfer what they have learned by listening to non-authentic materials to their attempts to understand authentic speech.

On the other hand, Ur (1984) proposes that the practice of listening inside the classroom should normally include such characteristic of real-life listening. However, most of the listening texts in the textbooks of our schools and universities in Sudan are made up of passages originally composed as written texts as well as the listening exercises in many of the English textbooks are not accompanied with recordings which contain the accurate feature of the language. These sorts of activities may not supply any of the student's realistic preparation for real-life listening. Therefore, the students who enroll in the tertiary levels are not familiar to the authentic features of the language and when they are engaged in real

life listening may face difficulties to comprehend and cope with real-life listening situations. In most real-life listening situations, the speaker can be seen to the listener. Therefore, non-verbal clues such as gestures, lip movements, and body language can be used to understand the speaker's message (Hedge 2000: 242). Moreover, there are other factors that affect 'Live' conversation and comprehension such as the speaker should be aware of the audiences' needs and should make sure that his message is obvious and effective, particularly when he talks with non-native, the educational standard, the quantity of information on the listening topic, the mental standard, the momentary fluctuations and the listener's interest in the topic. Samuels (1984:184) has obviously put the key questions for comprehension of the listener that a speaker should think about them carefully before having a 'Live' conversation and it can be very difficult for the listeners to comprehend what the speaker is saying if he is not success to address the below questions:

Has the speaker correctly judged the level of background of the listener? Is there an appropriate match between the information presented by the speaker and the listener's background knowledge? Does the speaker make appropriate adjustments for the listener's background in terms of examples given, rate, and pacing of information presented? Is the speaker aware of the need to modulate the loudness of the voice according to the distance between the speakers, the listener? And the acoustic properties of the room? Is the vocabulary appropriate? Is the sentence structure too complex for the listener?

9. PREVIOUS STUDY

The researcher reviews the contributions of some other researchers in the area of listening obstacles to students who are not English e has presented a previous study which important for having a clear picture, that helps for giving suggestions and assistance.

- **Title:** English Listening Comprehension Problems of Students from China Learning English in Malaysia
- **Date:** 2013.
- **Place:** University Saints Malaysian, Malaysia.

• **Main questions:**

1- What are the English Learning Comprehension problems faced by the students from China in USM?

2-How do these problems affect students on their listening strategies and pace of listening?

• **Methodology:** The study used a qualitative method to collect data from three Chinese students taking English Listening Comprehension in University. These three participants have different English Listening Comprehension. The researcher chose the Chinese students from the highest level are level four in the language center of Saints Malaysian University.

• **Main findings:** The findings of this study indicated that: English Language Comprehension learning through the use of the strategies provided by the students can promote and enhance motivation in ELC learning.

The study above showed that there are three strategies used by the learners during the listening process. The first strategy is identifying the main idea during listening. The three participants in this study have good experience in identifying the main idea from the guided sentence or concluding the sentence. The second strategy is resulting from some words or sentences that are repeated many times in the listening content. The third strategy is the speed of the speech; the important information usually spoke slowly and clearly by the speaker. The study explores the listening problems and strategies faced by Chinese students with the aim of improving their listening skills. In general, this study is expected to provide useful information for conducting more effective English as Second Language (ESL) listening Comprehension at the language center in Saints Malaysian University. The study had shown that Chinese students learning ELC faced pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening problems that need to be addressed and also they have adopted certain self-learning strategies.

The difference between the previous study above and the present paper is that: This paper tries to draw the attention of the readers that instructors need to encourage the students to develop their interests in the cultures of other parts of the world, particularly

the culture of English language to foster their understanding in English Language Comprehension.

10. THE METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This paper has adopted a descriptive method. The instrument has been used is the questionnaire. The researcher wants to get information about the hindrances that Sudanese students faced in English language listening while taking the listening activities at College of Languages at AlMughtaribeen University.

The questionnaire has consisted of close-open ended questions. The researcher distributed the questionnaire to eighty students and he used a five-point scale when 1-represents the lowest and 5-represents the highest scale of the listening obstacles. The numbers from 1 to 5 were designated by the adverbs of frequency: 'Never', 'Seldom', 'Sometimes', 'Often', and 'Always'. These adverbs of frequency used in the same order as they already mentioned. Finally, the data obtained from the questionnaire was presented, calculated and analyzed qualitatively.

11. QUESTIONNAIRE'S ANALYSIS

The researcher has presented and discussed the results of the questionnaire according to its hypothesis.

Hypothesis One:

Many of these hindrances pose the most difficulty for AlMughtaribeen University students in listening comprehension.

Statement (1):

Unfamiliar speech and pronunciation of native speakers interfered with my listening comprehension.

Table (1.1): Unfamiliar speech and pronunciation by One-Sample Test

Statement	Test Value = 3			
	t	df	Sig.(2tailed)	Mean Difference
Unfamiliar speech and pronunciation of native speakers interfered with my listening comprehension	9.651	79	.000	1.113

The above table (1.1) shows there was a difference of statistical significance in the unfamiliar speech and pronunciation of native speakers interfered with the students' listening comprehension, where sig(2-tailed) equal 0.000 which is less than 0.05. While the mean difference is 1.113, and t statistic is 9.651 with the degree of freedom 79.

The result in the table (1.1) agrees with the previous research that indicates pauses and hesitations in natural speech cause comprehension mistakes for non-native speakers (Voss, 1979). On the other hand, it indicates that most of the students encountered difficulty to know the word because of the pronunciation.

This result agrees with Ur's view (1984) which states that the learner may not know the word if it is pronounced differently or may even miss the word completely in terms of its existence.

In general, Sudanese students are familiar with their teacher's accent. When they come across the pronunciation of native speaker which characterized by incomplete sentences, unstructured language and fast rate of delivery; it is challenging for the learners to understand the listening text (Underwood, 1989; Yagang 1994).

Table (1.2): The unfamiliar speech and pronunciation

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Never	2	2.5%
	Seldom	4	5.0%
	Sometimes	14	17.5%
	Often	23	28.8%
	Always	37	46.3%
	Total	80	100.0%

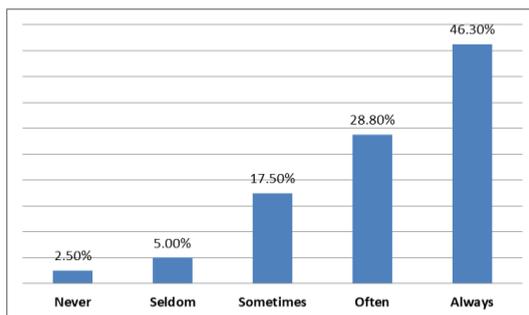


Figure (1.2): The unfamiliar speech and pronunciation

Statement (2):

The native speakers' fast speech interfered with students' listening comprehension.

Table (2.1): Native speakers' fast speech by One-Sample Test

Statement	Test Value = 3			
	t	df	Sig.(2tailed)	Mean Difference
The native speakers' fast speech interfered with my listening comprehension.	9.194	79	.000	1.238

From the table (2.1) above, there was a difference of statistical significance in native speakers' fast speech interfered with the students' listening comprehension, where sig (2-tailed) equals 0.000. It is less than 0.05. While the mean difference is 1.238, and t statistic is 9.194 with the degree of freedom 79.

We can understand from the result obtained from the table (2.1) above, the natural speech of native speaker which the students consider it as fast speech interfere with the listening comprehension of all most of our students.

Table (2.2): The native speakers' fast speech

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Never	5	6.3%
	Seldom	4	5.0%
	Sometimes	8	10.0%
	Often	13	16.3%
	Always	50	62.5%
Total		80	100.0%

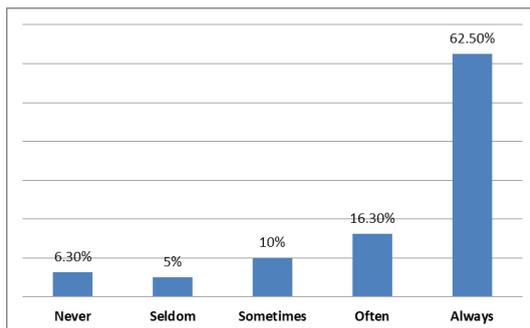


Figure (2.2): The native speakers' fast speech

Statement (3):

Native speakers use different speaking styles that interfered with my listening comprehension.

Table (3.1): Native speakers use different speaking styles by One-Sample Test

Statement	Test Value = 3			
	t	df	Sig.(2tailed)	Mean Difference
Native speakers use different speaking styles that interfered with my listening comprehension	9.133	79	.000	1.150

The above table (3.1) shows there was a difference of statistical significance in native speakers use different speaking styles that interfered with the students’ listening comprehension, where sig (2-tailed) equal 0.000 which is less than 0.05. While the mean difference is 1.150, and t statistic is 9.133 with the degree of freedom 79.

The result in the table (3.1) reveals that the main sources of the students’ listening hindrances in listening comprehension are connected with the normal spoken features of the native speakers.

Table (3.2): Native speakers use different speaking styles

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Never	4	5.0%
	Seldom	4	5.0%
	Sometimes	9	11.3%
	Often	22	27.5%
	Always	41	51.3%
	Total	80	100.0%

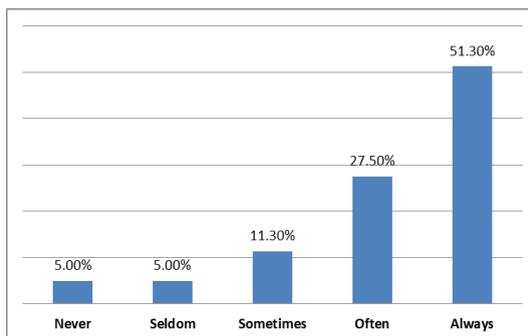


Figure (3.2): Native speakers use different speaking style

Table (4): Hindrances affect students' performance by One-Sample Test

Mean	Std. Deviation	Test Value = 42			
		T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
52.4625	4.32228	21.650	79	.000	10.46250

The above table (4) shows there was a difference of statistical significance in students' despondences', where sig (2-tailed) equal 0.000 which is less than 0.05. While the mean difference is 10.46250, and t statistic is 21.650 with the degree of freedom 79.

Table (5): Chi-Squared Test

No	Statement	Chi-Square(a)	df	Sig.	Decision
1	Unfamiliar speech and pronunciation of native speakers interfered with the students' listening comprehension	52.13	4.00	0.000	Significance
2	The native speakers' fast speech interfered with the students' listening comprehension.	93.38	4.00	0.000	Significance
3	Native speakers use different speaking styles that interfered with the listening comprehension	62.38	4.00	0.000	Significance

From the table (5) above, the value of the significance level is equal to 0.000 for all the statements which are less than 0.05. that means there are statistically significant differences for the three statements.

Hypothesis One: Many of these hindrances pose the most difficulty for AlMughtaribeen University students in listening comprehension.

AlMughtaribeen University students were asked to recognize the most challenging listening hindrance for them. They are mentioned below in detail.

Table (6): Students' replies which refer to the listening hindrance that poses the most challenging

Item NO.	Statements	Students %	Mean	Question Direction
1	Unfamiliar speech and pronunciation of native speakers interfered with my listening comprehension	28.8%	4.11	Often
2	The native speakers' fast speech interfered with my listening comp.	62.5%	4.24	Always

3	Native speakers use different speaking styles that interfered with my listening comprehension	27.5%	4.15	Often
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Table (6) shows that the main sources of the students' listening obstacles are connected with the normal spoken features of the native speakers. They were the speech style, the pronunciation and the fast speech of the native speakers. We can deduce from the table (6) that the normal spoken features of native speakers were the main hindrance that posed the most difficulty for the AlMughtaribeen University students at the College of Languages in Sudan.

12. THE RESULTS

First-year students of AlMughtaribeen University at College of Languages were the subject of this paper. The researcher has gathered the data by using the questionnaire.

The central objective of the paper is to find the curial hindrances which students come across in listening comprehension and to evaluate whether these hindrances are connected with the speaker or not. In addition, the study wants to identify which specific hindrance poses the most challenged for AlMughtaribeen University students. After the data has been analyzed, the researcher pins down the following points:

- According to the students' judgment, the fast speech of native speakers and pronunciation were the main hindrances that pose the most challenge for them.

- The pronunciation, the speaking style, and the fast speech of native speakers. Besides that, the overlap of speech in listening activities.

The above findings will help instructors to train students in developing suitable listening strategies so that they can get rid of the problems in understanding the authentic listening text.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper stated that AlMughtaribeen University students faced listening hindrances whenever they are involved in listening

activities. Regarding the findings of the study, the researcher has reached some recommendations which should be taken into consideration by authorities, instructors, and students.

1- Instructors should familiarize their students to the normal feature of spoken English by listening to authentic passages. They should choose activities that are suitable to the students' actual language capability.

2- Teachers should depend on the theoretical basis in their teaching in order to raise students' listening ability. They should change the listening classroom from a teacher-centered classroom to the student-centered classroom.

14. CONCLUSION

Based on the data presented in this paper and within the limitation, the following conclusions are drawn.

Students are generally unfamiliar to the spoken features of native speakers. According to the students' judgment, the fast speech of native speakers and pronunciation were the main obstacles that pose the most challenge for them. This due to the unfamiliarity of students to the normal feature of the spoken language. Besides, the overlap between speakers in listening activities interfered with the students' listening comprehension.

15. SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER STUDY

The researcher suggests further studies should be done on listening comprehension so as to increase the standard of the student's language competence. The following suggestion is made.

Further study should be conducted on teaching listening strategies carried out by English instructors of AlMughtaribeen University at College of Languages. They may consider to design and promote listening courses to help willing students to enhance their listening skills.

It is hoped that more researches are carried out with a large sample on how to improve listening skills. The researcher did not use

a large sample to generalize an overall conclusion applying to the majority of English learners in Sudan.

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