Understanding Student Hearing Difficulties toward Native and Non-Native Speaker Accent in L2 Listening Assessment

*Memahami Kesulitan Pendengaran Siswa
terhadap Aksen Penutur Asli dan Bukan
Penutur Asli dalam Penilaian Mendengarkan
Bahasa Kedua*

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Abstract

The accent is one of the characteristic forms of the language used for communication when outside or inside the language learning classroom, then understand difficulty listening to students through the Native and Non-Native Speaker Accent in L2 in the listening assessment requires a more thorough investigation. The purpose of this study to explore how extent students can understand native and non-native speakers with different accents and how they perceive about hearing difficulties toward Native speaker accent and Non-native speaker accent. This research focuses on 12th graders majoring in hospitality at state vocational high school in Bangkalan, Madura. The research data were collected through observation and interviews. The results of this study show that the clarity, speed and accent of native and non-native speakers (American) and non-native speakers (Indonesian) become difficulties and barriers for students to understand and complete their listening tasks. This is because they are used to hearing accents from non-natives speakers rather than accents from native speakers. Furthermore, when students took the American Accent English Test compared to the Indonesian Accent English Test, all scores were much lower.

Abstrak

Aksen merupakan salah satu bentuk karakteristik bahasa yang digunakan untuk berkomunikasi saat diluar maupun didalam ruang kelas pembelajaran bahasa, maka mengerti kesulitan mendengarkan dari siswa melalui aksen penutur asli dan aksen bukan penutur asli pada bahasa kedua dalam penilaian mendengarkan memerlukan penyelidikan lebih menyeluruh. Tujuan dari penelitian ini untuk mengetahui sejauh mana siswa dapat memahami penutur asli dan bukan penutur asli dengan aksen yang berbeda dan bagaimana persepsi mereka tentang kesulitan mendengar terhadap aksen penutur asli dan bukan penutur asli. Penelitian ini berfokus pada siswa kelas 12 yang mengambil jurusan perhotelan di sekolah menengah kejuruan negeri di Bangkalan, Madura. Data penelitian ini dikumpulkan melalui observasi dan interview. Penemuan dalam penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa kejelasan, kecepatan berbicara dan aksen dari penutur asli (Amerika) dan bukan penutur asli (Indonesia) menjadi kesulitan dan hambatan bagi murid dalam memahami dan mengerjakan tugas mendengarkan mereka. Ini

karena mereka sudah terbiasa mendengarkan aksen dari bukan penutur asli daripada aksen dari penutur asli. Kemudian, Semua skor jauh lebih rendah ketika peserta didik mengikuti tes bahasa Inggris beraksen Amerika dibandingkan dengan tes bahasa Inggris beraksen Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

For vocational high school students in hospitality major, four skills in language are one of the demands they must master especially listening skill. Listening is an effective skill in the process of understanding spoken language (Büyükahiska & Uyar, 2019). Listening skill is also a process of understanding language which includes insight hearing and auditory perception. Then it requires the ability to understand as well distinguish similarities and inequalities in sound, intention, attitude, judgment, experience, and training (Buck, 2001). Buck also stated that there are seven main characteristics of listening as follows: informality of language, in short, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, noise, and redundancy. If any of these characteristics are not fulfilled, listening won't be perfect. The speaker's pronunciation is one of the most frequent characteristics skills are neglected in most hospitality majors in vocational high schools. And, it also happened at state vocational high school in Bangkalan, Madura.

Hospitality students at state vocational high school in Bangkalan, Madura were selected for this study because listening courses are one of the most important lessons to be accomplished in their field of work. Bangkalan hospitality students at Madura State College are also given various listening assignments to familiarize themselves with listening to English accents from native and non-native speakers every week. In addition, more than a half of the students in this major were fluent in English.

Many similarities or dissimilarities in sound are possible occurs because of the speaker's accent. It is linked with the speaker's native and non-native language. The function of the English language

encourages people to present a wide variety of characteristics around the world. The accent is one proof of the diversity of characteristics of the language function (Majanen, 2008). The accent has become a characteristic form of language for communication when outside or inside the language learning classroom. According to (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016), the accent is one of the difficulties may many students face in the process of understanding listening to language. (Buck, 2001) indicates that when the listener hears a foreign accent such as Indian English for the first time after studying American English to be in critical difficulty in listening. This will certainly interfere with the whole listening comprehension process and at the same time, a foreign accent makes comprehension impossible for the listener. (Munro & Derwing, 1995) suggest that too many accented words can cause decline which is important in understanding. According to (Goh, 1999), 66% of students mentioned accents speaker as one of the most significant factors influencing the listener's understanding. Thus, understand difficulty listening to students through the Native Speaker Accent and Non-Native Speaker Accent in L2 in the listening assessment requires a more thorough investigation.

Foreign accents of both native and non-native speakers can cause serious internal problems in listening comprehension and fluency of speakers' communication. Along with the growth of non-native English speakers, speakers have also brought a variety of English accents. Various language accents a variety of English can have a bearing on what listeners understand. Now there are more native English speakers rather than native English speakers, and this has resulted from several changes in the role and

function of English in various parts of the world in recent times (Jenkins, 2015; Crystal, 2003; Kirkpatrick, 2010; Mesthrie & Bhatt, 2008).

The issue of speaker accent in listening assessment has emerged as an area of inquiry (Llurda, 2004). There is a theoretical foundation for a shared-L1 effect based on the principle that L2 accents are primarily characterized by transfer from the L1, and that listener who shares a speaker's L1 will have an intimate familiarity with the phonological patterns of that speaker's L2 accent. Robust empirical findings have shown that exposure to an accent aids the Clarity of a different speaker with the same accent (Bradlow & Bent, 2008; Clarke & Garrett, 2004) and it has been assumed that L2 listeners will find speakers who share their L1 most comprehensible given their greater level of familiarity with that variety (Flowerdew, 2012). Assess listening comprehension a speaker with a homogeneous accent may be less representative of the construction listen. Speakers with multiple accents can cause unfair harm to some test takers (Ockey & French, 2014). The assessment technique used in this study is the Gap-filling technique, which is used to assess students' ability to listen to and understand every word in the text. In this study, we demonstrate that if students hear sounds familiar to their accent, it will affect their scores and listening preferences. It also significantly affects the difficulty of students understanding English in studies.

There are only a few researchers who determine how native accents and non-native speakers become an obstacle for students to get maximum scores in the assignment to listen to what is given by the teacher. This study uses the results of interviews and descriptive discourse analysis. The researchers explore the opinions of students majoring in hospitality about the challenges they face from the listening task by comparing natively and non-native accents. (Ockey et al., 2016) states that if you find

more than one accent type in a domain of use of the target language, students must be able to speak or understand more than two dialects of the same language. (Kang et al., 2018), argued that when the test-taker very well understood the English accent of the speaker in the test, then listening test scores will be higher and improved than test-takers who cannot understand the speaker's English accent in the test. (Harding, 2011) states that L1 listeners are listening to tests featuring L1 accented native speakers was more beneficial for students than those featuring non-native L1 accented speakers.

Regarding previous studies, most of them only focused on the use of native speakers and accents non-native speakers in the speaking class and their effect on students' listening skills. Some of them use quantitative methods to determine the effectiveness of differences accent on students' listening ability in completing all listening assignments given by the teacher. However, it is very rare to find differences in speaker accents that can determine the accuracy and proficiency of students in listening assessments. In addition, the important reason for doing this research is that researchers want to thoroughly explore students' views on varieties in different languages by examining how students classify and evaluate varieties.

Further, this study is beneficial because listening is one of the language ability that has a significant impact on a student's language comprehending, it is important for the learner to grasp the native and non-native speaker accents. If students can better comprehend their students' experiences with other speakers' accents, teachers will be able to identify better strategies to support these students as well as guide the teachers who work with them to meet their needs, particularly in their listening capacity.

However, a lack of research, especially in the context of Indonesian students of hospitality vocational high school, affects the impact of different speaker accents which may determine students' accuracy and

proficiency in listening assessments, particularly using gap-filling technique test. Based on the background of the study, the formulation of the research problems in this study are as follows: (1) To what extent can students understand native and non-native speakers with different accents? (2) What are the students' perceptions about hearing difficulties toward Native speaker accent and Non-native speaker accent?

In order to answer these study issues, the analytical objective was to explore how extent students can understand native and non-native speakers with different accents and how they perceive about hearing difficulties toward Native speaker accent and Non-native speaker accent in L2 listening assessments at state vocational high school in Bangkalan, Madura.

METHOD

This study was conducted with the total participation of 4 vocational hospitality high schools students at twelfth grade who were fluent in English. They have practiced their listening skills with listening texts in native English accent for which textbooks have been published by National Geographic (Heinle Cengage Learning). None of the participants attended the class in additional languages and none of them are native speakers of English. A procedure Retrieval of quantitative and qualitative data involving the percentage of students' understanding test results and students' perceptions of the listening test for native speaker accents and non-native speaker accents. There are two listening recording is selected. Every listening to the recording involves people of any nationality Americans and Indonesians. The reason for choosing these instruments is because they include original materials and non-native English-speaking people with phonological characteristics different.

Researchers collected data through two stages. The first stage is observation through gap-filling tests to test and compare comprehension skills listen to participants as

they listen to accents including those they are not used to hearing in class while practicing their listening skills. The accent is selected to take into account the different phonological characteristics of each other, which reveals the fact that people can sound different even though they speak the same language. In correspondence with the characteristics of each listening text, different types of tests were involved gap-filling tests, filling in the gaps prepared for each tape. The second stage is the interview through open-ended questions to find out more about what obstacles they are getting when listening to the same text with different speaker accents (native and non-native). In both listening recordings, it was aimed at participants to pay more attention to items vocabulary, thus, a gap-filling test was conducted. In other record where vocabulary items do not indicate a distinct pronunciation problem. When choosing materials, there are several bullet points considered, such as the participant's level of proficiency and background information. It confirmed that the vocabulary items and structures involved in the material cannot interfere with participants' listening comprehension.

The research was conducted in the classroom at school obtain the necessary permits by the institution. Test paper containing gaps in the text distributed before the tape begins playing for review by participants. They earn little information about the recording to be played so they can guess what material will be discussed in the tape. Each recording starts playing in turn after the participant is ready and they are expected to complete the test as they listen to the recording. Each recording is played 2 times. Test paper of each recording collected after listening to the text. The researchers assessed the test papers and averaged the numbers the correct answer for each test is considered to be the average level of listening comprehension for the test.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This section presents the results of the current study. The first research question that this study aimed to examine was about the degree of listening comprehension of the participants who listen to recordings from native speakers and non-native accent speakers. Answers to questions the first is presented in **Table 1**. The second question

aims to provide a comparison of difficulty and resistance between listening comprehension levels for native accents and non-native speakers.

Research Question #1 To what extent can students understand native and non-native speakers with different accents?

Table 1. Number of the correct and incorrect answers of the tests for each accented tape by the students

Participant	Native Speaker		Non-Native Speaker		Items	Mean Score	Percentage Equivalent
	Correct	Incorrect	Correct	Incorrect			
Student 1	6	1	7	0	7	5.3	75%
Student 2	6	1	7	0	7	5.0	71%
Student 3	4	3	6	1	7	4.7	67%
Student 4	5	2	7	0	7	4.2	60%

First listening record that the participants tested using a native speaker accent from America, none of the participants could fully understand what was said inside the tape. The first and second students both answered 6 questions correctly and answered 1 wrong question. While the third student answered 4 questions correctly and answered 3 wrong questions. Finally, the fourth student answered 5 correct questions and 2 wrong questions.

Based on the table, the level of listening comprehension for this accent is moderate. None of the participants failed and most answered more than 3 questions with the right. Mean score correct The answer is 5.3 out of 7 questions. The equivalent percentage is 75%.

Research Question #2 What are the students' perceptions about hearing difficulties toward Native speaker accent and Non-native speaker accent?

The test taker's perceptions of listening difficulties consisted of perceptions of clarity, speaking speed, and accent.

a. Clarity

The term clarity refers to the clarity of speech or the proportion of a speaker's output

that the can listener easily understands. The clarity of the speaker's speech is also possible for listeners to easily answer all tests quickly and precisely. The following are some of the perceptions made by the students:

Can you hear the recordings conveyed by native speakers (Americans)?

Student 1: I can hear what a native speaker is saying. However, in certain words, I also couldn't hear it. Maybe it's because I didn't focus on the time the recording was playing.

Student 2: almost all the words in the question text are heard even though some words I do not understand.

Student 3: I just need to hear clearly what a native speaker is saying and there are also some words that I don't hear and understand either.

Student 4: I am not one hundred percent sure if I can hear all the words in the text clearly because some words confuse me when listening to the pronunciation.

Can you hear the recording delivered by a non-native speaker (Indonesian)?

Student 1: Fairly clear and easy to understand.

Student 2: For me the recordings delivered by Indonesian speakers are clearer than the recordings delivered by American speakers

Student 3: Yes, clearer than the first recordings delivered by American speakers.

Student 4: self-explanatory and I find it more understandable than the first (American) speaker.

In this case, all the students assumed that the recording played using an accent was a native speaker more difficult for them to understand than a non-native speaker accent. This is because there is difficulty understanding words that are less clear from the native speaker when the accent is thick. Native speakers can be heard in the ears of the students.

b. Speaking speed

Speaking speed is the speed and pause, the ability of a good person to control the speed of speech. If the speaker speaks too fast, the information conveyed will be difficult to be accepted by listeners, besides those listeners will also find it difficult to conclude the meaning of the information. Below shows the students' perceptions of speaking speed which is one of the obstacles or difficulties of students in answering the test:

Does the speaking speed of the native speaker when delivering the text on the test questions make it difficult for you to understand it?

Student 1: Yes, because I'm not used to listening to native speakers speaking English. So when native speakers speak English, I am a little confused to listen and understand the words they pronounce.

Student 2: The delivery of test questions by native speakers is quite fast. So I

couldn't understand all the pronunciations that the native speaker said.

Student 3: Yes, I find it very difficult with the native speaker speed in delivering test questions. It also made it impossible for me to focus on all the words because I was still trying to understand the previous word.

Student 4: I find it difficult to interpret and understand all the texts on the test questions because one of them is the speaking speed of the native speakers.

Does the speaking speed of the non-native speaker when delivering the text on the test questions make it difficult for you to understand?

Student 1: When I listened to the second recording, I felt that I understood every word better. That's because the speaking speed of the non-native speaker is slightly slower than the native speaker.

Student 2: I feel I can better understand the test questions delivered by non-native speakers or on the second recording because the second speaker conveys the text a little more slowly.

Student 3: native speaker delivers the test question text very quickly and makes me confused to understand all the text presented. While non-native speakers deliver the text of the test question are slower. So that I can better understand the entire text presented.

Student 4: non-native speaker when delivering the text on the test question is not as fast as the native speaker. So I have no trouble understanding the text on the test questions.

From all of the students' perceptions that have been described above, this can prove that students will experience difficulties when the native speaker delivers the text on the test questions. This is because of the problem the test delivered by the native speaker is faster, while the non-native speaker delivers the text a little slower.

c. Accent

The accent is the correct emphasis on a syllable in a word or sentence, better known as pronunciation.

Did you have no problem while doing the test listening to the native speaker accent record?

Student 1: The first time I listened to a native speaker recording, I had a little bit of clarity on what information was conveyed. Even after listening for the second time, there still were some words I couldn't understand, even though I could understand the accent.

Student 2: the native English accent of American speakers in conveying the text of the test questions is a little different from the English accent I usually listen to in class. This made it a little difficult to understand all the text questions.

Student 3: I find it difficult to hear the accent of native American speakers because I am not used to it with my ears.

Student 4: I have difficulty listening to a native speaker accent because some words are pronounced with an accent that is different from my accent as a non-native student.

Did you have trouble doing the test listening to the accent recording of non-native speakers?

Student 1: not without problems. However, because of the non-native speaker accent (Indonesian), I

am used to hearing. So I have no trouble understanding the content text on the test questions.

Student 2: I had almost no difficulty or trouble listening to recordings from non-native speakers and it was enough to help me understand the text on the questions.

Student 3: I encountered no difficulties in the second recording which used a non-native speaker accent which made it easy for me to understand every word in the question text.

Student 4: the accent used by non-native speakers is very familiar to my ears, so I have no trouble understanding every word conveyed by non-native speakers.

In this case, it can prove that all students assume the accent of the non-native speaker is easier for them to understand than the accent of the native speaker. The non-native speaker accent can also help students to understand and understand all the text presented on the test questions.

Discussions

The results of the research in question 1 indicate that native speaker accents have a similar effect on student scores. This finding supports the study of (Harding, 2012), which states if Student scores are influenced by native-speaker accents. When referring to learners' perceptions of listening to different speakers, 3 things (clarity, speed of speech, and accent) are difficult for students to listen to native and non-native speaker accents to answer all tests. Research results question 2 shows that the accent of native speakers and non-native speakers affects students' perceptions against the clarity test. All participants who heard a native speaker (American) accent were considered more difficult to understand than the accent of non-native speakers (Indonesian). Language speed can also cause difficulty understanding, analyzing American speed

and people's accent America which is faster than a speaker with an Indonesian accent on the record. In this case, the results of the interview revealed that students who were accustomed to listening to accents non-native speakers will have an inaccurate perception of accent clarity than native accent speakers.

Regarding attitudes toward accents, all test takers showed a strong preference for accents native speakers. These findings support previous research (Kang et al., 2019; Büyükahıska & Uyar, 2019; Kaur & Raman, 2014; Harding, 2012; Zhiying, 2018) that students have a preference for accents L1 as their L1. All students also have the perception that native speaker accents affect student scores because test students tend to think of American English as an accent non-native and difficult to complete test assignments under non-native records. All participants on the test obtained a higher score in the non-native speaker (Indonesian) accented test than in the Native speaker (American) accented test. Thus, accent familiarity affects the score listening in this study. On the other hand, these findings support the view of (Rezaei et al., 2011; G. J. Ockey & French, 2014; Kang et al., 2019) that L2 learners scored higher when they listened to an accent familiar or non-native (Indonesian) speakers, and they score lower when listening to foreign accents or native (American) speakers.

All test takers prefer to learn and listen to Indonesian accents in class than American English. In this study, accent familiarity may have influenced preference accent. The selection of listening text files should be more careful. Researchers assume that all Listening scripts are spoken by native speakers and non-native speakers have levels different difficulties. Test takers perform several versions of the recorded listening, and they are responding to different test items. Their test score was higher on non-native speaker accents because the difficulty level of the listening test is lower than the native speaker accent listening test. In

addition, participants' backgrounds can also affect their test scores. In the feedback, several participants mentioned that they found one person listening to texts very easy as it relates to their major.

CONCLUSIONS

The influence of accents on listening comprehension, perceptions, and attitudes of Bangkalan Hospitality School students was explored in this study. This study found that the students' listening score, differences in accent may greatly influence their listening comprehension. Moreover, all participants had a positive attitude toward native speakers and non-native speakers' accents. Furthermore, the American accent influences students' difficulties in understanding and answering all tests is given to obtain a satisfactory score. All scores are much lower when learners took a test of American accented English compared to the test Indonesian accented English. Thus, students are less likely to perceive the influence of the American accent on listening, but the Indonesian accent influences the test taker's impression of clarity. As a result, it related to the hypothesis of this study where the accent familiarity affects to students' listening score and preference, and this is immensely affecting the difficulty of students' listening course. Therefore, further large-scale research needs to be carried out to further analyze about the relationship between accent and listening comprehension, as well as L2 learners' perceptions and attitudes towards accents.

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