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## Listening Difficulties of EFL Students on Short Talk of the ITP TOEFL

Tiara K. Pasaribu<sup>1✉</sup>, Jubilezer Sihite<sup>2</sup>, Donna Ria Pasaribu<sup>3</sup>, Dusman Pasaribu<sup>4</sup>,  
Sabrina Anjelina Siburian<sup>5</sup>

Program Studi Sastra Inggris Fakultas Bahasa dan Seni, Universitas HKBP Nommensen

Email : [tiarakristina@uhn.ac.id](mailto:tiarakristina@uhn.ac.id)<sup>✉</sup>

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini menganalisa mengenai kesulitan mahasiswa dalam mendengarkan wacana lisan akademik yang biasa ditemukan pada bagian C, Listening Section pada ITP TOEFL. Mahasiswa semester 6 yang mengikuti kelas TOEFL pada prodi Sastra Inggris merupakan subjek dari penelitian ini. Mereka diberikan dua jenis ujian mendengar, pertama, ujian untuk melihat kemampuan mereka dalam memahami wacana topik akademis (listening comprehension). Ujian kedua diberikan untuk menentukan pengetahuan mereka dalam fonologi Bahasa Inggris dalam enam kriteria (short and long vowel, voiced and voiceless sounds, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /f/, /p/. and /v/ sounds, diphthong and triphthong, silent letters and reduced form) pada bunyi bunyian Bahasa Inggris (Phonological Knowledge). Kuesioner juga diberikan untuk melihat kesulitan mereka dalam mendengarkan wacana lisan akademis (short talk). Hasil dari penelitian membuktikan bahwa kemampuan mendengar mahasiswa adalah rendah, dimana 71.43% mahasiswa memiliki nilai kurang dari 50% pada pemahaman mendengar (listening comprehension) mereka. Hasil dari ujian ke dua membuktikan bahwa Sebagian mahasiswa belum mampu menuliskan bunyi dari kata yang mereka dengarkan. Sebagian mahasiswa melakukan penambahan bunyi, menukarkan bunyi lain, menuliskan kata kata yang tidak tepat dan lain lain. Hasil dari jawaban-jawaban dari kwesioner mengisyaratkan bahwa sebagian dari mereka tidak memiliki pengetahuan yang cukup mengenai bunyi-bunyian Bahasa Inggris dalam enam kriteria yang diuji, sehingga menghasilkan miskonsepsi pada jawaban mereka.

Kata Kunci: *Mendengarkan, berbicara singkat, TOEFL*

## Abstract

This study analyzes the difficulties of students in listening to academic oral discourses which are commonly found in section C, Listening Section of the ITP TOEFL. This research used quantitative and qualitative research which investigates the 6th semester students who were taking the TOEFL class in the English Literature Department. There are forty two students used for the subject of the research. The technique of collecting data were given by Listening comprehension test and questionnaire: comprehension test is a test to see their ability to understand the discourse of academic topics (listening comprehension). The second test was English phonology in six criteria (short and long vowels, voiced and voiceless sounds, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /f/, /p/. and /v/ sounds, diphthong and triphthong, silent letters and reduced form) on English sounds (Phonological Knowledge). Questionnaires were also given to see their difficulties in listening to academic oral discourse (short talk). The research findings proved that students' listening ability were low, where 71.43% of students scored less than 50% on their listening comprehension test. The results of the second test prove that some students have not been able to write down the sounds of the words they hear. Some students add sounds, exchange other sounds, write down inappropriate words and so on. The results of the answers to the questionnaire indicated that some of them did not have sufficient knowledge of English sounds in the six criteria tested, resulting in misconceptions in their answers.

Keywords: *Listening, Short talk, TOEFL*

## INTRODUCTION

One way of proving one's English ability is by providing the toefl score which is accepted internationally. In Indonesia, the TOEFL test used is the PBT test in the ITP (Institutional Testing Program). Many companies and government agencies required their future candidates to supply them with the TOEFL ITP certificates. Indonesian students who took the test consistently got low score for the Listening section of the TOEFL. In this research, the author will try to find out what difficulties these students faced in doing the test. This research will focus on the third section of the TOEFL Listening section, namely the short talk. Researches of listening are very rarely found especially in short talks or Part C of the Toefl. . However, listening difficulties seems to be the problem for Indonesian students. Foreign students have difficulties in answering the Listening Section 1 Part C, because in this part of the test, the audio consists of a speaker which is usually a lecturer discussing an academic topic. Students find this part is the hardest exam piece that is tested in the listening section. Part A is short sentences dialogue, Part C is a longer conversation which is usually between two friends or three friends exchanging a conversation. In Part C, it is a short talk, or a lecture by a professor in a class, or it could be an extended conversation where speakers are talking about a certain topic. For this part, students will need to focus on the dialogue and try to guess the answers that might be asked after the dialogue. For this part,

having an excellent memorization skill, having full focus on the dialogue is really vital. However, there might be more difficulties that students need to overcome first in order to improve their listening skill. "In order to understand a spoken message, four main types of knowledge may be drawn on: phonological- the sound system, syntactic-how words are put together; semantic - word and propositional knowledge and pragmatic- the meaning of utterances in particular circumstances". (Flowerdew, Jhon, Miller, 2005). Learners need to have the knowledge on the sound system or phonological awareness, how words are put together or syntactic, word and propositional knowledge or the semantics and the meaning of the utterances in the context that they were said. These knowledges will need to be acquired by the learners in order to improve their listening skills. Goh (2002) in (Nation, 2009) mentioned that the first step in strategies training is finding out the particular problems that listeners face in listening comprehension, recognizing word forms and keeping up with what is coming in. They may also not have enough time to turn perceived form into an appropriate message. While they struggle over one part they may miss what follows. Goh suggests that problems can occur at the levels of perception, parsing and utilization"

As mentioned by Goh (2002), the listening difficulties can occur at the levels of perception, parsing and utilization or how the learners perceive the words they heard, and how the syllables of a certain utterances are incorrectly heard and finally how the use of the word or utterances are perceived in their minds. Also Goh stated that the speed of the lecture or conversations might be too fast for them to digest the spoken message properly. In order that the learners can comprehend the lecture and conversation from the Listening section of the test, learners might need to do some practice in helping their listening comprehension. Lynch and Mendelsohn (2002: 207, p.39) suggest the following targets for practice: (a)discriminating between similar sounds, (b) coping with and processing fast speech, (c) processing stress and intonation differences, (d) processing the meaning of different discourse markers (e) understanding communicative functions and the non-one-to-one, (f) equivalence between form and function, e.g., "It's cold in here". Consequently, it seems that having phonological knowledge of the correct pronunciation in the dialogue will be a much more important skill to have. Foreign students find that doing listening tasks are difficult mainly because the correct pronunciation is perceived differently when they mispronounced a word, a phrase even an utterance. Azmi Bingol, Celik, Yidliz, and Tugrul Mart (2014) in (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016) stated that "the level of students can have a significant role when they listen to long parts and keep all information in their mind. It is very difficult for lower level students to listen more than three minutes long and complete the listening tasks"

In the ITP TOEFL Listening Part C, the listening task for this section is the longest

monologue or dialogue that students need to listen and remember. Unlike the IELTS where the students or exam takers are allowed to take notes, in the ITP TOEFL, taking notes are not allowed. Therefore, for this section, the students need to concentrate using their full attention and try to remember what the speaker is explaining.

Richard in (Brown, 2000) stated the difficulties of listening in different ways. They can be seen as follows: (1) Clustering: attending to appropriate —chunks of language—phrases, clauses, constituents, (2). Redundancy: recognizing the kinds of repetitions rephrasing, elaborations, and insertions that unrehearsed spoken language often contains, and benefiting from that recognition, (3) Reduced forms: understanding the reduced forms that may not have been a part of an English learner 's past learning experiences in classes where only formal —textbook language has been presented, (4) Performance variables: being able to —weed out hesitations, false starts, pauses, and corrections in natural speech. (5) Colloquial language: comprehending idioms, slang, reduced forms, shared cultural knowledge, (6) Rate of delivery: keeping up with the speed of delivery, processing automatically as the speaker continues, (7) Stress, rhythm, and intonation: correctly understanding prosodic elements of spoken language, which is almost much more difficult than understanding the smaller phonological bits and pieces, (8) Interaction: managing the interactive flow of language from listening to speaking to listening, etc.

Phonology can be described as the study of “phone” or sound. While the word “-logy” means the science of. Therefore, phonology is the science of sounds. It studies the speech sounds of a language. Phonological linguistic knowledge can be considered as the ability of speakers to understand the sound of the language, the sound system, the stress, prosody of the language. Phonological processing ability is the ability to process the relationship between the sound of letters (phonemes) and the shape of letters (graphemes). Phonological processing capabilities consist of phonological memory, phonological naming, and phonological awareness. Among these three aspects, phonological awareness is believed to be the most influential factor in decoding and spelling abilities (Stratman and Hudson, 2005) in (Harsanti, 2020) As stated by Stratman and Hudson (2005) having phonological awareness is vital in decoding and spelling abilities, in this case learners need to have the perception in the phonological processing ability to understand a language. These ideas are supported by Adams (1990), Kirby, Parilla & Pfeiffer (2003), Wagner et al (1997) in (Li et al., 2012), “Phonological awareness (PA) is the ability both to recognize that spoken words can be broken down into sound units and also to talk about, reflect upon, and manipulate those units,” Foreign students learning the English language are able to sound out a letter, a word or a phrase and even utterances of the language by sounding out the phonemic symbols from the International Phonetic Alphabets, where each sound has its own symbol. This is clearly stated by ThambiJose,

2014 "Phonemic representation represents the sounds for linguistic studies (especially phonetics, phonology and speech processing). The linguist, A.C.Gimson created the most popular system of phonemic transcription. He used symbols from the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) to represent phonemes in English". For the Phonological knowledge that ESL students should acquire will be based on the following areas: . Long Vowel versus Short Vowel, Voiced and Voiceless Sounds, C. /s/, /z/, /ʃ/ sounds and p/, /f/ and /v/ sounds, Diphthong and Triphthong, Silent Letters, Reduced Forms

The researcher used the term phonological knowledge instead of phonological awareness due to the fact that ESL students should have the phonological knowledge found in the six criteria above. The use of the word knowledge is preferred because awareness meant realizing or recognizing the phonological aspects consciously, while knowledge would be the experience of the students in learning the phonology and all of the aspects in learning the English language.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses mixed method to analyze the listening difficulties experienced by EFL students doing the ITP TOEFL Section 1 Listening Part C. The listening difficulties will be analyzed firstly by using a listening comprehension test and a listening cloze test or fill in the blanks with the word from one of the six phonological knowledge to check on their misconceptions of the sound. Finally, a questionnaire was distributed to the subjects to learn their opinion on their listening difficulties. The data of this research will be the answers from the students based on their listening answers for Part C, firstly the listening comprehension test, and secondly the phonological knowledge of the students. The students' responses were analyzed using the categories of Phonological knowledge and analyzing the responses from the questionnaire on the difficulties of Listening to Short Talk from Part C of the Listening Section of the TOEFL. All of the Listening tests and the questionnaire were administered online using google classroom due to the current situation of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Giving out the ITP TOEFL Section 1 Part C using Google Classroom in a zoom meeting to invigilate and answering using google form: Correcting the answers for Section 1 Part C, Giving out the questionnaires and Categorizing the misconceptions in the phonological knowledge of the students. The Technique of Analyzing the Data are determining the listening comprehension of the students, identifying the misconceptions of the phonological knowledge, mapping the misconceptions of the phonological knowledge of the students with the correct pronunciation, analyzing the listening difficulties based on the questionnaires, and deciding the findings of the listening difficulties in ITP TOEFL Section 1 Part C based on the Phonological Knowledge.

## RESULT

Listening Comprehension of the students

Table 4.6. The Percentage of Listening Test Comprehension with the Most Incorrect Answers in Short Talk 1 & Short Talk 2

No	Question	Percentage
1.	What was the value of the original gold eagle? \$20.00 , \$15.00, \$10.00, \$5.00	69.04%
2.	What is the restriction on collecting gold coins today? Gold coins may be imported without restrictions, Gold coins may be collected but not exported  There are few restrictions on the collecting of gold coins, Only certain kinds of gold coins may be purchased and sold.	66.67%
3.	What kind of music is associated with Stephen Foster? Sentimental tunes, Plantation song, Hymns for churches, Serious society music	64.28%
4	Why did Stephen Foster withhold his name from the cover to some of his sheet music at that time? He was too young to publish music at that time, His name was not yet very well known, He knew that some songs would not be approved by high society, He reserved his name for this most popular music	85.71%

The result of the students' listening comprehension is low. 71.43% of students have less than 50% of total scores for their listening comprehension. The highest score was 80% (3 students) and the lowest score was 20% (2 students). The misconceptions of students' phonological knowledge: After analyzing the answers that the students gave after doing the cloze test, the findings for the students' phonological knowledge can be seen in the table below:

Table 4.7. The misconceptions of students' Phonological Knowledge

No	Questions	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Usually (4)	Always (5)
	I .... try to listen very attentively (full concentration)	0%	2.8%	5.6%	Knowledge	47.2%	44.4%
	I .... find it difficult to understand the short talk in part c of TOEFL	2.8%	11.1%	38.9%	misconception	30.6%	16.7%
	I .... find the person's speed in	2.8%	13.9%	30.6%		38.9%	13.9%

	talking in the audio is too fast								
	I .... know the pronunciation of the words in the talk	0%	11.1%	41.7%	38.9%	8.3%			
	I .... find that my vocabulary level creates difficulties in the listening section	0%	13.9%	33.3%	36.1%	16.7%			
	I .... have problems in spelling English words	19.4%	16.7%	41.7%	19.4%	2.8%			
	I .... realize that my problems in spelling might cause difficulties in listening to the short talk	11.1%	8.3%	38.9%	30.6%	11.1%			
	I .... understand the main topic that is being discussed	0%	8.3%	36.1%	44.4%	11.1%			
	I .... know all of the words meaning that are being uttered	0%	11.1%	52.8%	27.8%	8.3%			
	I am .... able to follow the whole dialogue in the audio very carefully	0%	5.6%	38.9%	38.9%	16.7%			
	My most difficulty in listening to short talk is ...	A		B		C		D	
	A. Following the flow of the dialogue								
	B. Cannot comprehend what the speaker was talking about	16.7%		19.4%		41.7%		22.2%	
	C. The pronunciation of the speaker is difficult to understand								
	D. All of the above								
	I .... realized that my inability to understand the short talk is due to my inaccurate pronunciations	2.8%	8.3%	41.7%	38.9%	8.3%			
	I am .... aware of the difference of the short and long vowel sounds have different meanings	0%	5.6%	38.9%	36.1%	19.4%			
	I am .... aware of the voiced and	0%	5.6%	47.2%	36.1%	11.1%			

	voiceless consonant sounds						
	I am .... aware of the correct stress of the word syllables will affect my ability to understand the short talk	0%	8.3%	38.			
	I .... understand the combination of vowel sound/reduced form/diphthong/triphthong.	0%	13.9%	55.			
	I .... understand that some letters are silent and pronounced without the letter sound.	0%	5.6%	36.			
	I am .... aware that my inability to hear linking vowel sound affect my ability to understand the word in the utterance.	0%	2.8%	38.			
	I .... understand the reduced form in a spoken message (e.g. I wanna eat ice cream to I want to eat ice cream)	2.8%	5.6%	30.			
	I am .... motivated to improve how to understand the listening of short talk in part c of TOEFL test.	0%	2.8%	16.7			

Students' phonological knowledge of the words in Listening Section Part C of the TOEL indicated that students employ strategies in answering. The strategies were: Students couldn't relate the sound in the word in relation to the audio, Students added extra sound ending like /-s/, /-d/, Students ignore the final sound like ounces to ounce, students changed the prefixes from "ambivalent" to "prevalent" and "bivalent", Students cannot differentiate diphthong and triphthong, short and long vowel, Students cannot differentiate silent letters, Students cannot identify reduced form, Several students answered out of context. The Findings based on the questionnaire : The highest percentage was 55.6% in which students answered that they sometimes understood that the combination of vowel sounds, reduced form diphthongs and triphthongs. The second highest percentage was 52.8% in which students answered that they sometimes knew all the words meaning being uttered. The third highest percentage was 47.2%

in which the students answered that they were aware of the voiced and voiceless consonant sounds. For the question on finding out their most difficulty in listening to short talk was answered as A. Following the flow of the dialogue 16.7%, B. Cannot comprehend what the speaker was talking about 19.4%, C. The pronunciation of the speaker is difficult to understand 41.7%, and D. All of the above 22.2%. Then 41.7% of the student found that the pronunciation of the speaker was difficult to understand. Table 4.8. The Percentages of Students' Responses to The Questionnaire In answering the second problem in this research, the listening difficulties that occur during the listening to short talk in TOEFL could help students in improving their phonological knowledge. The reasons are as follow: 1. Using the help of the educators especially in the listening class, pronunciation class and vocabulary class can help students to be aware of their students' problems on specific or even general areas. 2. In increasing the students' phonological knowledge, Teachers, lecturers and those who implement the curriculum should include in their lesson plans tactics on improving students' understanding in listening to short talk on academic subjects. 3. More exercises should be implemented where students should get used to listen to a lecture or other academic discourse. 4. Several levels of listening classes should be included in an English Department curriculum. In this case the students will get much more practice in listening to a short and long discourse. The tactics to improve students' phonological knowledge would be:

By increasing students' phonological awareness of the difference sounds in the English language.

By increasing students' academic vocabulary in various subjects so that the students are able to identify the word in a certain context. By encouraging students to listen to different types of academic talks, By exposing students' cultural awareness besides their own cultures, By familiarizing the accents of speakers from different English-speaking countries.

## CONCLUSIONS

After doing this research, the conclusions are as follow:

- (1) The listening comprehension scores of the ESL students for the Part C of the Listening test in TOEFL were considered low. Students have difficulties in answering on the topic of the short talk in part C of the TOEFL Listening section 71.43% of students have less than 50% scores for their listening comprehension.
- (2) Students couldn't relate to the pronunciation of the word in context due to low level of vocabulary in academic topics which can be seen in the misconceptions of the words that they hear with the actual pronunciation and some out of context answers that they gave.
- (3) From the questionnaire, the students responded that they sometimes have difficulties

following the speed of the speaker in the audio and have problems with the speakers' accents and seemed to answer with the adverb of frequency of only sometimes. Their answers reflected on their unawareness of their phonological knowledge, which caused the misconceptions of their mistakes.

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