The Impact Of The Phonological Quality Of Oral Input On The Development Of Students' Listening Comprehension Of Normal English

by

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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The purpose of the study was to determine if phonologically deviant teacher talk in English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom would influence students' ability to comprehend normal English spoken by native speakers. It also tried to find out if exposing students in such EFL classes to pre-taped English native speech would have a remedial effect on their listening ability.

The study also investigated the effect of the two variables on:

- The use of listening decoding strategies.
- The ability to decode spoken segments with different prosodic features.
• The ability to decode speech spoken at a relatively high tempo.

• The strategical use of stress in identifying meaning in an utterance.

To investigate these questions an ex-post-facto causal-comparative study was designed. One hundred and seventy-six students were subdivided into four equal subgroups, each identified as having one of the combinations of the two levels of the independent variables: highly deviant or highly normal teacher talk, and frequent or rare exposure to pre-taped native speech. A deviancy rating scale and a questionnaire for measuring frequency of exposure to pre-taped native speech were used to identify the two variables.

The subjects listened to two dialogues delivered at different tempo and were required to answer multiple-choice questions. This was followed by a dictation test. Six types of scores were computed for each student from these two tests: global listening score, listening decoding score, high rate speech score, low rate speech score, proportion of error category score and scores on each of the fourteen segments.

Analysis of variance and computation of correlations conducted on the scores have indicated that:
1. Deviancy in teacher talk has a negative effect on students' ability to decode speech but frequency of exposure to pre-taped native-speech has no significant effect.

2. Students in the four subgroups differ in the type of the decoding strategies they use. Highly normal groups tend to have more top-down strategies. Interaction effects on some strategies were detected.

3. The hierarchy of difficulty of segments having different prosodic features is the same for the two main groups.

4. Speech spoken at a comparatively high rate is more problematic for the deviancy group than for the normality group.

5. Students in the deviancy group depend on stress cues more than those in the normality group.