

## Sound Problems in Interpreting: a Comparative Study of Undergraduate Program at Sebelas Maret State University

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### ABSTRACT

The study is to classify the problem triggers in consecutive interpreting especially in listening. The objectives of the research are to find out the relationship between listening skills and sound problem by comparing the test results of English student and non-English student and prove that students' problem triggers are closely related to the writing and reading performances which are caused by listening skill problems such as domain in comprehension, similar word, etc. The method used in the research is descriptive qualitative. The participants are English Department and non-English student. Technique of collecting data in the research uses questionnaire, test, and interview. The biggest problem faced by non-English student group is numbering and proper names. It is 34 % which occupy in first rank. Whereas the percentage of English student in comprehension is 27%, then the numbering and proper names, the last is similar word which has 20%. Meanwhile, the test result of English group is 84.5 and non-English group is 60. It represent the background knowledge factors are also play an important role in doing the test. In conclusion, there is relationship between students' problem triggers, writing and reading performances, especially homophone errors. So, the hypothesis is accepted and it strengthens a currently underdeveloped theory that sounds problem play an important role in listening.

**Keywords:** *consecutive interpreting, error typology, listening skill, problem triggers, sound problems.*

### INTRODUCTION

In the existing literature on interpretation, sound problems are often referred to as one of the most common "problem triggers" (Ribas, 2012). A few comparative studies have focused on this issue in an attempt to investigate the causes of such difficulties or propose any solutions to overcome them. Sound problems are integrated in the linguistic system that they belong to as their meaning strictly depends on their syntactical and lexical formats. This means that the recall of previously stored words will be successful only if each single item composing them can be recalled in the correct order as per the original stimulus.

Research on problem triggers and its classification in interpreting have been conducted by Ribas (2012) and Mankauskiene (2016). In the research provides the general breakdown of problems and strategies in interpreting which are very complex. Meanwhile, Mankauskiene classified two major factors which emerge when interpreting is ongoing process. As well as try to identify the problem triggers that (most likely) caused errors and omissions of important information with a specific focus not only on one specific problem trigger, but also on one of the trigger groups, namely, or lexical items. It is important to note that interpreting different with

other forms of communication which is studied in linguistics. It involves at least one participant who is neither the initiator nor the addressee of the message (Setton, 1999 in Mankauskiene, 2016).

This complex communication has a number of challenges for interpreters which Gile (1995 in Pochhacker, 2004: 100) named “problem triggers” as a model. He defined problem triggers as “anything that increases the processing capacity requirements of an interpreter (more effort needs to be put into listening/understanding, short-term memory or production) or increases signal vulnerability” (ibid in Mankauskiene, 2016). Understanding these interpreting difficulties may help solve problems of communication through an interpreter.

Overcoming problems of that kind involves a certain amount of intuition. An interpreter should avoid wild guesses. It is often possible, relying on the context, to “fill in the blanks” of a statement when elements of them are unclear or indistinctly heard. It can be helpful if one tries by imagining. It can be anticipated what the speaker is likely to say, how he or she is likely to say it, and how it can be made comprehensible to the audience for which one is interpreting (Nolan, 2005). Moreover, he advises that trains the ear to recognize the sounds of SL and TL, to grasp difficult accents, and to recognize nuances and idiomatic expressions are very helpful by trying an exposure to two or more language.

As Gile (1995/2009 in Mankauskiene, 2016) mentions, problem triggers in interpreting have not been analyzed in the past using a common conceptual framework. Moreover, they have not been analyzed in all their complexity. Only separate problem triggers have been studied, such as: note-taking (Cardoen, 2012; Hanh, 2006; Lu, 2013; Lištiani, 2010;), note-taking and memory (Meifang, 2012), memory and language skill (Christoffels, Groot, Krool, 2006), numbers (Pinochi, 2010; Mazza, 2001), short-term memory (Duong, 2006), Pronunciation (Simon, Kilyeni, Suci, 2015; Hassan, 2014), working memory and verbal fluency (Stavrakaki *et al*, 2012; Köpke and Signorelli, 2011; Ricle *et al*, 2015), cognitive load (Seeber, Kerzel, 2011).

Listening problems stated by Field (2003) are caused by signal is processed through several

levels such as auditory-phonetic, phonemic, syllabic, lexical, syntactic, semantic, proportional, pragmatic, and interpretive to be able to construct the meaning. One major cause is segmentation problem which is lack of between word pauses and equally important one to modify the words when they occur in connected speech.

More specific problems according to Field (2009) states that a problem of understanding, listening in this case is caused by a single word tend to assume that the listener does not know the word, and teach it as a new item of vocabulary. However, a listening problem at word level has at least six possible causes. They are:

- the learner does not know the word;
- the learner knows the written form of the word but has not encountered the spoken form;
- the learner confused the word with a phonologically similar one;
- the learner knows the spoken form of the word but does not recognize it in connected speech generally or in this utterance in particular;
- the learner recognized the spoken form of the word but failed to match it to any meaning;
- the learner recognized the spoken form of the word but matched it to the wrong meaning.

Liping (2014) gave classification deals with several listening problems which emerge such as: little listening practice out of class, lack of listening vocabulary, lack of phonological knowledge, to guess one or two new words but resulting in missing the following part, poor memory, new words & spelling, non-intelligence factors, learning environment, grammar, context knowledge, speaker hand writing, difficulties in understanding passage partly, proper names and people’s name. Those problems actually play a very important role in processing information within learners’ brains (Aitchison, 2006; Liping, 2014: 6). Meanwhile, inadequate word recognition can be the cause of confusion in relation to second language comprehension (Rošt, 2002; Liping, 2014: 6).

Tsui & Fullilove (1998 in Vandergrift & Goh, 2012) observed that successful listeners need good perception and word segmentation skills. This

is very important to give great attention because the boundaries between the words are often very hard to determine and guess (Goh, 2000 in Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Word segmentation skill has close relationship with acoustic signal in every single word which comes so fast and then it is gone. This is particularly true for beginning and intermediate level listeners. Cicourel (1999 in Rošt, 2011) stated that each language has preferred strategies in locating the word boundaries, named segmentation. In English, the preferred lexical segmentation strategy is identifying stressed syllables and organizing word identification around those stressed syllables.

Another aspect of listening deals with sound problems is numbering system. SL and TL have different structure of numerical system that will be crucial point in receiving and processing information (Pinochi, 2010). Dealing with numerical system, it is needed the distinction between 'number' and 'numeral'. Number is a arithmetic symbol or object or word indicating quantity units whereas the numeral is a symbol representing a number to name them such as Arabic numeral, Roman numeral, etc (Hornby, 1995; Hurford, 1987).

Like all other linguistic system, the numerical system has own structure both phonologically and alphabetical code. Both of them must be match and synchrony to get high accuracy between spoken and written. Experimental study in numerical system of simultaneous interpreting (SI) conducted by Pinochi concludes that there are common mistakes in writing numerical system when the listener (interpreting). The types of number errors identified by Pinochi are: omissions, approximations, lexical errors, syntactical errors, errors of phonemic perception, and errors of transposition.

Thinking about the points that listening skill had many barriers, it is useful to look for the relations between the skill and its barrier related with consecutive interpreting. In order to find out whether there is a relationship between listening skills and sounds problem or not. This study was conducted by comparing the exam results of English student and non-English student. Based on the theoretical framework above, we assumed there is close relationship between the products

of their actual writing and reading performances, especially homophone errors in different major caused by listening skill problems which have mentioned in the end of early parts.

The participants of the study were chosen whose majors were undergraduate program of English and non-English Department. One of the groups (English) was composed of five students. All of them were female. The other group (non-English) was also five students. All of them were male. The research did not explore the impact of gender difference. By choosing different major, it was originally designed to know how far they mastering English as second language.

The method used in this research was descriptive qualitative method. The data collection tool consisted of 50 questions provided consist of homophone words (single word and phrases), numberings, and the last one was proper names which were mixed in the test. In this study, the students took a written listening exam. In listening exam, a short listening track was used in the exam. The students were expected to answer the questions in the form of multiple choices, fill in the blanks drills, and chunking words. Finally, the data were hand-scored. Technique of collecting data in the research also uses questionnaire and interview to dig detail information in supporting the findings. Those techniques were also used to verify the data. The questionnaire is purposefully set to contain different forms of questions to explore more possible answers and thus contribute to the validity of the data they generated. This study was applied in two different classes in order to compare the results and improve the reliability of the study.

Due to the broad definition of problem triggers, it is impossible to list and research all of them at the same time. Therefore, to narrow down the object of a research project, a classification of problem triggers is required. This research try to analyze the group of problem triggers and their interaction with each other related with consecutive interpreting and its application in teaching and learning listening skill. Taking into account the importance of problems, the study designed by our research team hypothesize that students' problem triggers are closely related to the products of their actual writing and reading performances, especially homophone errors in

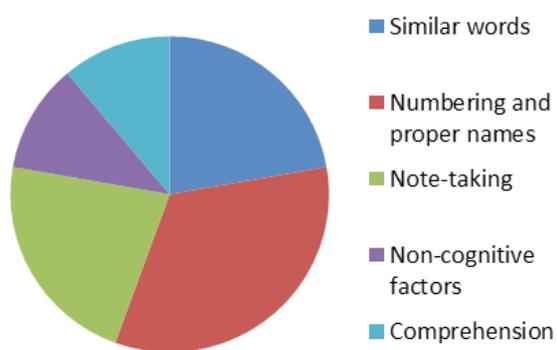
different major caused by listening skill problems such as domain in comprehension, numbering and proper names, and similar word, etc.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### The Result of the Questionnaire

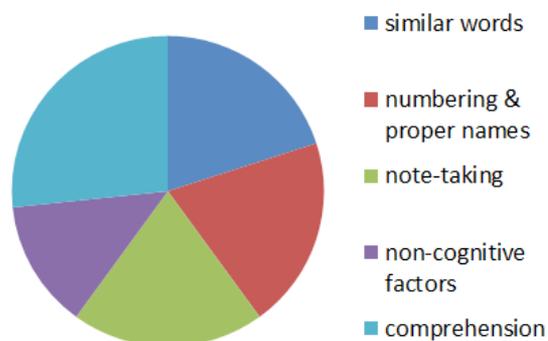
The questionnaire was conducted to know about the students' response about listening skill especially in sound problems. It was categorized in five issues based on indicators dealing with problem barriers in listening skill and it was categorized in two parts between English and non-English Student. Numbering and proper names, similar words, and note-taking are categorized as the problems based on phonology. Three major problems related with writing performances. So, students need to be taught the correct phonetics and sounds in order to minimize problems in perceiving the sounds uttered by native speakers. The general recapitulation of the questionnaire as follow:

**Figure 1**  
The problems often faced by non-English student in listening



It can be seen that the most of crucial problems faced by non-English student group is numbering and proper names. It is 34 % which occupy in first rank. Note-taking and similar word (homophones) is 22 % as second rank. The last, followed by comprehension and non-cognitive factors faced by the students. It is 11 %. Comprehension here has close relationship with students' reading and listening performance whereas note-taking related with writing skill.

**Figure 2**  
The problems often faced by English student in listening



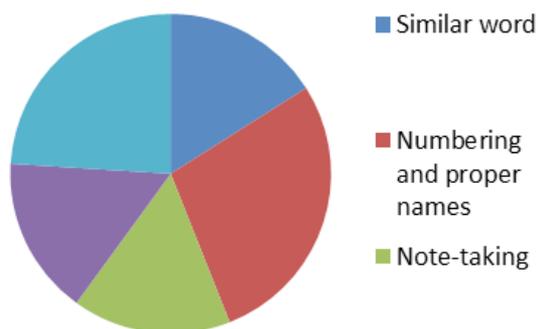
It can be seen that the most of crucial problems faced by English student group is comprehension in first rank. It is 27 %. Numbering and proper names is 20 % as second rank. Note-taking and similar word (homophones) is 20 % as third rank. The last, followed non-cognitive factors faced by the students. It is 13 %.

The difficulties in English and non-English are different. But when compared to other questions, it can be understood that there is not huge differences between comprehension and other problems. The major problem trigger of English student exactly is comprehension although the number of others domain is high enough such as numbering and proper names as well as homophones. But, the strange takes place in non-English student which is they have major problem trigger in numbering and proper names. It is contradicted with English student which have 27 % in comprehension while listening whereas in non-English student the difficulties of comprehension while listening only 11%. Therefore, the test is conducted to measure and compare the 'peculiar' result.

Total percentages of questions chosen by total students are given in the diagram above (figure 3). Although there are not giant differences between all questions in total, we can realize that the most stated one is about numbering system and proper names with the percentage of 28% and then followed by homophone (similar words) and comprehension problems with the same percentage of 22%. It is included in the category

of problems based on similar phonology system make confusing. Non-cognitive factor and note-taking follow it as fourth and fifth problem with the same percentage too. It was 15%, which is very surprising.

**Figure 3**  
Students' total respond on questionnaire



The most obvious similarities are the results concerning the omissions error, which turned out to be the most common mistake in writing down the answer when the record is played. It regards with the way of taking the note of numeral system which is the student have often difficulties to distinct the single word or number. External factors also have important role to give impact whether good or bad the answer quality. Thus, it demonstrates us that students still need practice in listening in terms of both practice phonologically and having necessary input in listening through listening activities regularly.

### The Result of the Test

The students were assigned to do the test. The First was English students' result. The researcher calculated the mean score to get the result by using the following formula:

$$M_x = \frac{\sum X}{N} \quad M_x = \frac{427}{5} = 85.4$$

The second one was non-English students' result. The result as follows:

$$M_x = \frac{\sum X}{N} \quad M_x = \frac{300}{5} = 60$$

**Table 1**  
The student score

No.	English	Non-English
1	100	45
2	96	57
3	90	52
4	71	80
5	70	66
$\Sigma$	427	300
Average	<b>85.4</b>	<b>60</b>

It can be shown that this English student (in column number 4) may have problems regarding with psychological reasons in listening skill based on the result above. It's seen that the student may do not feel relaxed during listening activities. The score level of non-English student (in column 4) is the highest one of all students in non-English students. Once again, it is a problem of lack in practice generally and may be caused by psychological reasons. It can be drawn by using following diagram between English and non-English students' attainment.

Looking at the data we may draw some tentative conclusions. First, there is little difference result between English and non-English in doing the test. Second, there is peculiarity of the one of student' result. Although English students' score has higher mean score generally, but there is in column number 4 found that English student score is lower than non-English student score. It regards with students' exposure is needed to strengthen and reinforce their own skill. It enlightens us that students seriously need practice and input in listening skill and in their learning habits. It needs more information why it is happened by using in depth interview to two students only (English and non-English) based on the oddity above.

### The Result of the Interview

The researcher asked to the students some questions which divided into three categories. They were the general problems in English skill especially, the difficulties faced by students in listening skill, and the last was the difficulties in sound problems.

The first category discussed about the general problems in English skill. The students said that the most of students' obstacle in English was listening skill. Second category discussed about the students' difficulties in listening skill. Many factors made her difficult such as psychological barriers, lack of remembering something has been heard, lack of memorizing, tired easily when listening, and inability to concentrate. Third category discussed about sound problems as problem trigger in listening. The English student told that they know the word, but get the wrong sense, phonetic variation of a word confusing them (homophone). They confused in numbering system such as numbering structure and the difficulty in the date. They know the word in written but not the spoken version. They have difficulty to catch the word from a connected speech such as a dialogue and have barriers in remembering the proper names had been heard.

Besides, the key problems according to her are psychological condition and practicing. Student A reports that psychological here deals with the lack of attention or loss of concentration, felt tired when the test is being conducted as well as memorizing problem. In addition, student A also report that the dominant problem while the test is conducted is about recognizing consonants, vowels and syllables may sound very much alike (numbers, proper names, abbreviation).

Second question sharing deals with the similar problem between student A and student B. A has problem directly related with deficiencies of practice in listening whereas student B is often practice although a little practice. But, student B also report that the dominant problem occurred while listening is related to problems with the similar sound, numeral system and lack of attention / concentration. Numerals are integrated in the linguistic system that they belong to their meaning strictly depends on their syntactical and lexical formats.

So, from this situation we can underline that it should be exposed to target language as much as possible through songs, listening texts, films, reading activity regularly. If they do not have enough practice chance in developing their listening skills, they will surely have problems in catching up utterances made by native speakers.

## **CONCLUSION**

Interpreting is a communicative act (Mankauskiene, 2016). Therefore, this paper try to analyze the difficulties underlying the activity by grouping problem triggers (homophone, numbers, proper names, etc) as the problems emerge while an interpreter listen the utterance. As seen from the results obtained from the study done in English and non-English student in Sebelas Maret State University, Surakarta, it's been understood that the most important and crucial problems in listening skill is numbering and proper names mistake. And then followed with the words which have similar phonological system, in this case is homophone as one of sound problems in listening. The third one of main problem is comprehension. All of them also represent the problems faced by student generally while they do listening activity. It will be fatal if an interpreter and/or student doing a mistake in writing down the utterance which require the greater attention and concentration.

Given all the conditions described in the previous paragraphs, the study has hopefully contributed to enlighten on these particular aspect. Not only for consecutive interpreting but also extending to the teaching and learning numbering and proper names, homophone, and comprehension in listening skill which is all above still under discuss and rather contentious. Thus, the hypothesis based on the problem triggers and its correlation with the products of students' actual writing and reading performances, especially homophone and numbering errors are relevant. So, it can be accepted.

However, starting from problems classification above, the breakdown of the specific error typologies are not analyzed yet. This mini research based on a pilot study in order to support the expert argument in their research, especially interpreting skill. This research hopefully will be beneficial to a partial re-evaluation of the outcomes and bring the benefit for teaching and learning listening in making appropriate teaching listening method. So, to strengthen and sharpen the study, the future researchers are expected want to research the specific item such as error typology of numbering system or homophone pattern. It will be interesting and give big benefit to phonology and English pedagogy.

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