

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Motivation

English teaching in senior high schools in Taiwan has long been focused only on reading and writing (Lin, 2000; Wang, 2002), because these two skills are the only skills tested on college entrance examinations. Thus, teachers spend most of their class time explaining grammar, analyzing sentence structures, and teaching reading and writing skills. The grammar-oriented approach emphasizes accuracy rather than fluency (Chen et al., 1999). Moreover, more teachers take it for granted that listening comprehension will be developed naturally within the process of language learning by exposing students more to English. As a result, the training of English listening comprehension has been neglected for years, compared to those of reading, writing or even speaking abilities. In her survey of the four language skills, Lai (1985) finds that most of her subjects, 1,684 senior high school students, valued highly on the importance of English listening competency, but still thought that listening comprehension is the least emphasized skill in language learning despite their competency in reading and writing manifested in the result of the JCEE (Joint College Entrance Exam).

With the introduction of communicative approach, teachers have gradually understood the importance of listening comprehension in language learning. Likewise, the Ministry of Education have modified and revised the senior high school English curriculum, which puts emphasis not only on reading and writing but speaking and listening as well. Furthermore, many colleges and universities are requiring their prospective students to pass certain English examinations which emphasize listening

competency, such as GEPT (General English Proficiency Test). Thus, it is imperative that listening should be integrated in our teaching for students to have a thorough knowledge of the English language and also to meet the requirements expected by the society.

Although most of the newly compiled textbooks include a section that focuses on listening comprehension, it is quite paradoxical because the texts used for listening are basically in written form. Nevertheless, the features of spoken English differentiate a lot from those of written form (Don et al., 1981). In addition, the Chinese language is basically syllable-timed while English is stress-timed (Ing, 1984). As Brown et al. (1983) indicate that native speakers tend to mumble or slur speech sounds in natural conversation, which is often uttered in “chunks”. However, Chinese students tend to listen to every single word distinctively. This tendency makes it an obstacle in their listening to spoken English (Ing, 1984; Lin, 2000). Teng (1996), cited by Wang (2002), suggests that although a large percentage of her freshmen respondents regarded listening ability as the most important among the four language skills, they didn't know how to listen because their teachers had spent little time in classroom listening practice or seldom instructed them the listening skills. Therefore, there is a need for English teachers to expose EFL students to diverged topics in a native unanticipated broadcast to train their students' competency in listening to the language in real life. Nevertheless, with students' limited learning background, it is essential for teachers to sort out good materials suited for them. Although this takes time to select suitable authentic materials and to design properly for students' learning, teachers should bear in mind that listening comprehension is the prerequisite for speaking ability (Tsai, 1994).

It is without denying the fact that using other broadcast materials will in turn help students polish their listening comprehension. As a matter of fact, in Da Chi Senior High School, they do apply broadcast magazines for different graders to

cultivate their listening competency, but such broadcast materials are generally intended for pedagogical purpose, and thus the motivation impact is not that intense as compared to that of authentic materials, which are unanticipated utterances and, more importantly, closer to their daily life experience and interest.

In addition, after undergoing several years of research and studies, LTTC (Language Training & Testing Center) finally sets its goals and objectives of general English proficiency test (GEPT) for intermediate level in listening comprehension—examinees are expected to be able to understand daily conversation, weather reports, announcements, commercials broadcast over the radio, to examine their real-life English proficiency. Nevertheless, the above topics seldom exist in the textbooks, and if they do, they appear in written forms and recorded in somewhat unnatural utterances¹. Since universities put more emphasis on students' English competence, more and more senior high school students are encouraged to take GEPT and the results of the test are taken into consideration as part of the evaluation for entering college. As mentioned earlier, since students' listening comprehension is the least trained ability compared to the other three English skills, but plays an equally important role in English proficiency, it is necessary for teachers to select something real in daily life to supplement textbooks and give constant chances to students to cultivate their listening comprehension.

With respect to authentic materials, more and more researches have focused on applying authentic materials to instruct students' listening comprehension skills (Morrison, 1989; Tsai, 1994; Jie, 1994). Wang (2002) also indicates that there have been a lot of papers investigating Taiwanese college students' listening strategies and the results are all amazing. However, little attention is paid to the instruction on senior high school students, not to mention the selection of authentic materials and

¹ The speed of the utterances recorded for textbooks tend to be too slow and thus the intonation, being too emphasized, somehow lacks its authenticity

design of test types for EFL senior high school students.

Chen (2003) conducts a research among 32 adult learners aging from the early twenties to late forties to investigate the correlation between the test types and listening materials. In her study, she explores different text types for listening to conversation and monologue with different test types, including checking, picture numbering, blank-filling, true or false statements, multiple choices, error recognition and correction. It is suggested that “test types may not be the only factor in determining the difficulty of a listening test, and that other factors such as texts or materials and learners’ strategy ought to be considered as well”(p.9). As listening comprehension is a process of input, it’s hard to know what and how well the students perceive through listening. Hence, the present study will also design different test types based on the same topic. However, the test types in quizzes aim not just to examine the competence of the subjects or torture them, but to try to help students get the gist and gain enough training through different designs.

1.2 Significance and Purpose of the Study

The study attempts first to select appropriate authentic broadcast materials as listening supplements for EFL senior high school learners. It also explores the design of different question types to enhance and investigate the effect of listening to authentic materials. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses are provided to further probe into the effectiveness of applying authentic broadcast listening materials to students with different proficiencies.

The study is particularly significant because the use of authentic broadcast materials in senior high school is still at the groping stage. Teachers and students are keenly looking forward to more information about the implementation of materials concerning ‘real world’ and the effectiveness of it. Therefore, the research can serve as a practical guide for both teachers and students.

As mentioned in the above section, listening comprehension skills instructions are neglected in most high school education and the listening comprehension parts in most compiled textbooks lack authenticity. Therefore, the present study focuses on the following purposes:

1. To choose an appropriate and suitable authentic listening programs to augment and supplement the listening lessons from the existing textbooks;
2. To analyze the main difficulties encountered by students in their listening to authentic texts and provide them with tips and guidelines on how to improve their proficiency in this area;
3. To design an escalated and systematic listening test questions along with materials that would assist students in the process of comprehension;
4. To find out the effects of different test types on students with different proficiency levels;
5. To lead students to develop interest and total autonomy in their learning process through proper selection and design of authentic materials.

1.3 Research Questions

The present study aims to address the following research questions:

1. Are authentic broadcast materials appropriate as supplements for teaching listening comprehension to EFL senior high school students?
2. What problems do senior high school students encounter when listening to authentic broadcast materials?
3. Will authentic broadcast materials motivate students' learning interest in listening to authentic speech?
4. Will authentic broadcast materials cater to the needs of different levels of students and uplift their English listening proficiency?
5. Which text caters to the interest of EFL senior high school learners and highly

develop their listening proficiency?

6. Which type of tasks will highly evaluate students' listening proficiency and boost their confidence in listening comprehension?

1.4 Organization of the Thesis

The organization of this research is as follows:

Chapter One presents an overview of the study, including the background, motivation, purposes of the study, research questions and organization of the study.

Chapter Two is a literature review of previous studies on EFL learners' difficulties in listening comprehension, the theories of authenticities, the autonomy of learners, and the study of language testing.

Chapter Three discusses the experimental design and the method in conducting the present study, including the description of subjects and their English learning background, the instrumentation, and the authentic materials used in the research. In addition, a pilot study and the procedures of the whole research will also be given in detail, followed by the analysis of the data collections, including the scoring, the statistics and the questionnaire.

Chapter Four will further interpret the results of the data presented in Chapter Three and the findings as well. In addition, the effect of applying authentic broadcast materials and the possible reasons behind will be discussed.

Finally, Chapter five presents the conclusions and limitations of the present research, and some suggestions for further implications of authentic broadcast materials are also provided.