

Using shadowing to improve students' pronunciation of alveolar plosives

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Received: 30/03/2023; Accepted: 06/04/2023; Published: 14/04/2023

Abstract: *This study aims to observe the effectiveness of using Shadowing in improving students' pronunciation of the two alveolar plosives. Five second-year students at Foreign Languages Faculty participated in a 30 minutes practice session. After taking a pre-test, students started processing the method of Shadowing from a video with its transcript. Then they took post-test with the same questions at the end of the session. Students' pronunciation at pre-test and post-test was recorded as data, which were then quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed. The results reveal that the method helped students recognize the two ending sounds /t/, /d/ better. All of these findings contribute substantially to sharpening students' pronunciation.*

Keywords: *Using shadowing to improve students' pronunciation of alveolar plosives*

1. Introduction

The result from a short interview with 32 EFL students at Foreign language faculty (FLF) at Dong Thap University shows that their biggest difficulty in speaking performance is pronunciation. By hands-on experience in classrooms, it is observed that many second year students' at FLF find it difficult to differentiate the two alveolar plosive sounds when they are in speaking activities. Therefore, Shadowing is the proposed method in this small study to help students improve their pronunciation, particularly the two alveolar plosives.

2. Literature review

Shadowing is seen as effective methods for developing English Speaking skills. Mochizuki (2010) assumed Shadowing used to train speaking skills by repeating sounds using the authentic material. Shadowing was applied as "listening and uttering the exact words or sentences almost simultaneous with the spoken text or immediately after a group of words or sentences" (Etsuko, 2006, p.13). Moreover, the process of reading the script in shadowing help to prolong the remembrance of words.

Kun-Ting Hsieh, DA-Hui Dong, and Li-Yi Wang (2013) claims that shadowing was of effectiveness in helping learners adapt "the flow of English sentences". Moreover, shadowing has positive impacts on students' psychology involving English learning motivation.

Mori (2011) uses the method of combining

Speech Shadowing and Reading aloud on twenty EFL Japanese students. Mori proves that this combining method dramatically helps Japanese students improve the prosody. Therefore, this study continued to experiment this method on five second year English major students, and the observation is put on the two alveolar plosive sounds. Training process of the method in this study was a bit different from Mori's (2010) at the first step.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

Five students at Dong Thap University participated in this experiment. They were all second year English major students. None of them had obtained any English degree before.

Five students were numbered from one to five. The first student was abbreviated to "S1". Similarly, the other students were abbreviated to S2, S3, S4, S5, respectively.

3.2. Method's training process

Shadowing practice consisted of four stages: First, students were given a text which is the script of a video. They had two minutes to read it silently. Second, students started shadowing from the video without looking at the script. They shadowed sentence by sentence. Third, students were allowed to look at the script again and read it aloud while checking which words are new and difficult to pronounce. Fourth, students shadowed again without looking at the script.

Five participants practiced the method after taking pre-test. The video for practicing was close to the questions in the interview. The practice session lasted for about 30 minutes. The instructor directly instructed and observed five participants during practicing time.

4. Interview process

Students took two tests – pre-test and post-test – by directly interviewing. Pre- test and post-test were taken before and after the practice session respectively, so as to identify if five students could make any progress in English pronunciation after applying the Speech Shadowing in one topic.

Interviews were carried out in person. The interviewees were asked, and they had to answer four questions related to the topic “city and country life”. Then, students had a chance to listen to their recordings at pre-test. This helped them recognize what were good and necessary to be improved. The questions for interview at pre-test and post-test were the same so as to easily gauge the improvement of students before and after applying the method. For each question, students were asked to try to response more than one single sentence. The answers of each person were recorded by cellphone.

5. Results and discussion

After hearing the recordings made by five participants in pre- and post-tests, the number of pronunciation mistakes of each participant was counted. Figure below shows the number of pronunciation mistakes of five students in the pre-test and post-test

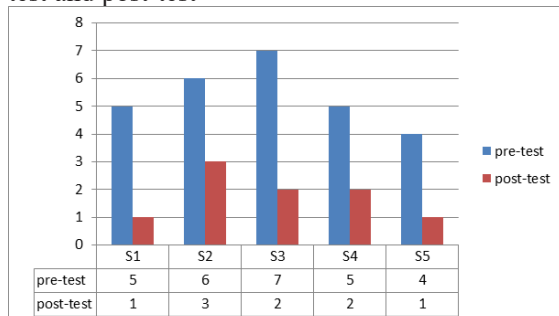


Figure: the number of pronunciation mistakes of five students at pre-test and post-test.

In the figure, the columns in blue and in red show the number of pronunciation mistakes of five students made at pre-test and post-test, respectively. As we can see in the figure, this number sharply decreased from pre-test to post-test. This means that shadowing had efficiency in improving pronunciation for students

in the chosen domain of questions. At pre-test, the most common mistakes of five students were with the final sounds /t/ and /d/. In details, At pre-test, one hundred percent of students mispronounced /t/ as /d/ and lacked these sounds at least once. The answer for the question (2) included many “ed” endings, which are transcribed as /t/ or /d/, so it was easy to observe. It is noted that eighty percent of students pronounced the word “countryside” without /d/.

It is worth pointing out that while practicing the method on the same topic, students had two chances to shadow from the video and two chances to read aloud the script. As a result, they paid more attention to word form and the final sounds /t/, /d/ when producing sounds. Therefore, the mistakes in pronouncing “countryside”, “lived”, “polluted” were improved but not completely because the frequency of these words in the talks were quite often. In “countryside”, S2 did not fix the lack of /d/. The number of mistakes students made at post-test were much smaller. Particularly, S2 still had three pronunciation mistakes in comparison to only 1 by S1 and S5. There were 2 mistakes in the talks by S3 and S4. This result somehow proves that students become more aware of ending sounds, especially the two alveolar plosives after the practicing shadowing.

6. Conclusion

Shadowing not only created opportunity for students to imitate simultaneously what they hear from native speaker voice but also has chance to read aloud the text by themselves. By this method, the present experiment has demonstrated that shadowing helped five participants improve their ending alveolar plosive sounds. Hence, it is suggested that students can themselves apply this method to improve their pronunciation as a whole.

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