A REFLECTION ON THE USE OF AUDIO LINGUAL METHOD WITH LISTENING AND PRONUNCIATION COURSE

Kong Saeher , Kunat Kiatpimon, Kiatkhajorn Napikul, Nattapoom Manwatee, Krittapot Tatongjai, Korawit Srijan, and Prarthana Coffin*

School of Liberal Arts, Mae Fah Luang University, Thasud, Chiang Rai 57100, Thailand
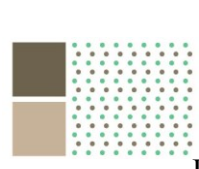
*e-mail coffin@plan.aau.dk

Abstract

In the first semester of the academic year 2012 Listening and Speaking 1 course (LS 1) has changed to Listening and Pronunciation course (LP) for the purpose of improving students' English listening and pronunciation skills. There was dissatisfaction with students' performance on their speaking accuracy after completing LS course; therefore the LP course was developed. One of the major differences between the two courses is the teaching and learning approach. LP course has brought back the use of Audio Lingual Method (ALM) to reinforce the improvement of students' listening and pronunciation skills which emphasizes accuracy first rather than fluency. Due to a big change in teaching and learning approach of the LP course, this study therefore explored how ALM was practiced and how students and teachers reflected on content, practice, and actual performance of students. Empirical data was collected through observations, questionnaires, and interviews as well as triangulated information with students' midterm scores. Participants of the study were 47 students and 2 teachers who participated in teaching and learning of an LP course in the first semester of the academic year 2012. The result from the observations revealed that the teachers were the center of the in-class sessions. Repetition was essential to the in-class activities; word by word and sentence by sentence. In addition, the result from student questionnaire indicated that 87.15% of students responded positively to the use of ALM and also perceived that the content and the practice of LP course are beneficial to them. However, on the average 65.32% of students continued to have problems with listening to and pronouncing certain sounds: [ʃ], [ʤ], [z], [ʒ], [tʃ] [ð], and [θ]. These are the absent sounds in their native language. Furthermore, the result from teacher interview and midterm scores showed an agreement on the students' improvement rate of listening and pronunciation skills. Regarding the triangulation information of the study, it can be concluded that bringing back ALM to be used in this case (English major students in an EFL context) is appropriate because it helps them to be more aware of sound distinctions and consequently it has helped them improve their listening and pronunciation skills.

Keywords: English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Audio Lingual Method (ALM), learning and teaching. English listening and pronunciation skills

Introduction

Mae FahLuang University (MFU) is known as one of the international universities in Thailand. Commonly, almost every course was written in English as well as teaching and learning. For this reason, English is truly important or inevitable for every MFU students, especially English major students. They need to study English and use it more than other major students. In studying and using English well, they need to be able to listen to, speak, read and write English correctly, particularly speaking and listening skills. Because of this, the Listening and Speaking (LS) course was introduced as a required course especially for
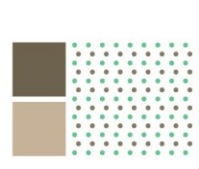
English Major Students since the first semester in order to make them able to apply to other courses. Nevertheless in the 2012 academic year, this course was changed into another course named "Listening and Pronunciation (LP)" (Katsura, 2012). The content of this course consists of all phonetic symbols: voiced and unvoiced symbols, including consonant sounds, vowels sounds, word stress and intonation. This is to help learners improve the basis of speaking which is pronunciation. According to LP course syllabus, the main objectives of this course are to improve students' listening and pronunciation skills. Besides, according to Yurovich (2012), the teaching approach of LP course is that the teachers will pronounce each word or sentence first and then let students to repeat the word and sentence. Teachers must correct the students if they mispronounce any word or sentence According to Kutsura and Yurovich (2012), the implementation of this new course requires native speakers of English to teach,. This course and the methods seem like one of foreign language teaching methods so-called "Audio Lingual Methods." Before being able to communicate well in English, it is necessary to pronounce each English word accurately; however, the LS course was all about conversation and simulation. Most importantly, most of the students who studied LS course still cannot communicate in English well especially listening to and pronouncing each English word (Katsura, 2012). Therefore, the LP course was designed to achieve the fundamental of the accurate pronunciation. Therefore, this research is set to find out the answers for the following two research questions that

    1.) How is the Audio Lingual Teaching Approach used with LP course?
    2.) How do the activities and the teaching approach used in LP course affect students' perception of their learning?

The result of this research aims to reveal advantages and disadvantages of the LP course. Feedback from both teachers and students will be useful for course developers to better this type of course for better learning results in the future.

Review of the Literature

Audio Lingual Method (ALM) is a language teaching method introduced after the World War II ended. According to Li, it was originally called the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) (Rahmawati, 2010). This teaching method was used to help non- native speaking English people to communicate in English with others. The ASTP was developed by the U.S. army in 1950s; and later was renamed Audio Lingual Method. The teaching approach emphasizes the speaking and listening skills rather than the reading and writing skills. Moreover, this method focused on basis of behaviorist theory (Joumen, 2007). This method is practiced practically and behaviorally. In teaching by applying this method, students are required to listen to their teachers and then repeat what they teachers spoke to them for using English grammatically. Undoubtedly, this method focuses on listening and speaking skills from a word to a sentence. It is obvious that the teachers will play the inevitable roles for this method. Therefore, the learning of every student will be done by practice and repeating what they are asked to do. Anggraeni mentioned that it is necessary to improve speaking and listening skills (Anggraeni, 2006). He said that the students have positive reaction to the audio-lingual teaching because the teacher will give more chances for the students to express their action. Moreover, audio-lingual method creates benefits: help students to be more confident to speak English and feel closed with the teacher. However, many researches pointed that Audio lingual method have some problems. For example, the speed and accent of native speaker are other problems and the lesson or content is difficult to understand (Rahmawati, 2010). Besides, Suryani found that audio-lingual method takes a lot of time and is difficult for teachers to select the material to teach (Suryani, 2012). She argued, however, it is not native speaker so it may affect the native pronunciation. As a result, it makes the learner imitate or receive incorrect pronunciation from the teacher. It can be said that the audio-lingual method has both advantages and disadvantages.

According to Katsura, Listening and Pronunciation course was redesigned to meet the problem of mispronunciation of English words before communicating, especially for the English major students at Mae Fah Luang University. Yurovich further explained that in the process of teaching and learning, he would pronounce each English word, phrase and sentence and then every student would repeat what he pronounced (2012). From this explanation, the method of teaching English in LP course is similar the Audio Lingual Method that the teacher pronounce and let students repeat to practice pronunciation correctly. The activities of LP in each week are related with the course objectives which are:

(1) Understand the difference between voiced and unvoiced phonetic sounds;

(2) Recognize and accurately produce all phonetic sounds in the English language including; consonant sounds, vowels sounds, consonant clusters, word endings and final consonant clusters;

(3) Correctly apply word stress to speech; and

(4) Correctly apply intonation to speech

Therefore, the activities provided during class sessions would allow students to practice their pronunciation and listening skills.

Methodology

This research is such a qualitative research. The research is going to be conducted as case study in order to reflect the result of the course and the feedback of the students and teachers of the course. The idea of this study is influenced by the teaching approach of Audio Lingual Method. Therefore, the approach will be used to study the teaching method used in the listening and pronunciation course and analyze the result of data collecting inevitably.

The data will be used studied and analyzed consists of the observation: 47 students and 2 lecturers including activities in every class for 5 weeks. Also the questionnaire from the 37 students (10 students missed: 5 students missed the class and 5 students withdrawn), Interview of 2 lecturers as well as the students' scores were studied and analyzed.

Selection of Participants and procedures

Participants were 47 students and 2 teachers who participated in teaching and learning of the LP course in the first semester of the academic year 2012. The procedures of the data collection as follows:

1. Contacted 2 teachers to ask for a permission to observe their sections (5 and 6) of listening and pronunciation course.
2. Observed dynamics of teachers and students during in-class sessions; every Wednesday from July, 25 to August, 29 (5 weeks).
3. Distributed questionnaire to students in the last week of observation, August, 29.
4. Interviewed one teacher in September 11th, non-structured interview.
5. Contacted teachers to ask for students' midterm score.

Results

Results of the study comprise a report on student questionnaire, 4 weeks observation, teacher interview, and students' midterm score.

Table 1 students' perception towards content and practice of the course and towards their listening and pronunciation skills

Question	Amount of student					Total
	Strongly agree	agree	Somewhat agree	disagree	Strongly Disagree	
1. Students' perception towards activities of the course						
1.1 improving students pronunciation correctly	22	15	0	0	0	37
1.2 making students understand content	13	23	1	0	0	37
1.3 making students confident to speak English	16	19	2	0	0	37
1.4 relate to content	15	16	6	0	0	37
Average of item 1	16.5	18.25	2.25	0	0	37
Percentage	44.6%	49.32%	6.08%	0	0	100%
2. Students' perception towards the usefulness of course content						
2.1 applying other courses						
2.1.1 Listening to lecturers clearly	12	20	5	0	0	37
2.1.2 Speaking or give presentation in English	14	18	5	0	0	37
2.2 applying other aspects in daily life						
2.2.1 Communicating in English	16	19	2	0	0	37
2.2.2 Understand English media (songs, movies)	15	15	7	0	0	37
Average of item 2	14.25	18	4.75	0	0	37
Percentage	38.5%	48.65%	12.85%	0	0	100%

Difficulty level of pronouncing English consonants

voiced sounds	Amount of Student(s)					Total
	Very difficult	Difficult	Somewhat difficult	Easy	Very Easy	
[b]	1	1	9	15	11	37
[d]	1	2	8	14	12	37
[g]	0	0	13	14	10	37
[m]	0	2	10	13	12	37
[n]	0	2	11	12	12	37
[Ŋ]	1	6	10	11	9	37
[v]	3	8	11	8	7	37
[ð]	3	9	11	7	7	37
[z]	5	8	9	7	8	37
[ʒ]	6	11	11	5	4	37
[l]	1	2	15	12	7	37
[r]	0	6	17	10	4	37
[j]	2	4	13	9	9	37
[w]	2	6	10	9	10	37
[tʃ]	7	4	12	8	6	37
voiceless sounds	Very difficult	Difficult	Somewhat difficult	Easy	Very Easy	Total
[p]	0	4	7	15	11	37
[t]	0	4	7	16	10	37
[k]	1	1	10	15	10	37
[f]	0	7	9	16	5	37
[θ]	0	8	10	13	6	37
[s]	0	6	6	15	10	37
[ʃ]	5	9	9	11	3	37
[h]	0	6	9	13	9	37
[dʒ]	7	8	10	7	5	37

Difficulty level of sound distinction (listening)

voiced sounds	Very difficult	Difficult	Somewhat difficult	Easy	Very Easy	Total
[b]	1	0	9	15	12	37
[d]	1	2	9	14	11	37
[g]	1	1	12	12	11	37
[m]	1	3	8	14	11	37
[n]	1	2	8	15	11	37
[Ŋ]	1	4	16	7	9	37
[v]	2	10	10	10	5	37
[ð]	4	8	12	7	6	37
[z]	1	12	10	8	6	37
[ʒ]	7	11	8	5	6	37
[l]	0	2	15	13	7	37
[r]	0	4	13	13	7	37
[j]	3	3	13	11	7	37
[w]	3	3	10	13	8	37
[tʃ]	9	8	12	5	3	37
voiceless sounds						
[p]	0	2	10	12	13	37
[t]	0	4	10	13	10	37
[k]	1	2	11	11	12	37
[f]	2	3	11	13	8	37
[θ]	4	7	10	10	6	37
[s]	0	7	13	7	10	37
[ʃ]	6	9	10	8	4	37
[h]	0	5	8	14	10	37
[dʒ]	8	8	10	8	3	37

From Table 1, it can be summarized that 38.5% and 48.65% of students perceived that the content of the course is highly beneficial and beneficial to them respectively. They also agreed that the activities of the course were very useful and useful to them at the rate of 44.6% and 49.32% respectively. As for the sounds that students agreed that they had difficulty to pronounce were [ʃ], [dʒ], [z], [ʒ], and [tʃ] at the difficulty rage of 59.46 % - 75.68%. Similarly the sounds that students agreed that they had problems to identify or differentiate were[ð], [ʒ], [tʃ], [θ], [dʒ], and [ʃ] at the difficulty rage of 56.76% - 78.38%.

Table 2 students' midterm score

No	Midterm score 30%	No	Midterm score 30%	No	Midterm score 30%	No	Midterm score 30%
1	23.52	10	26.37	19	23.91	28	24.63
2	24.51	11	27.9	20	26.43	29	26.4
3	23.4	12	24.06	21	26.28	30	25.29
4	24.45	13	27.06	22	24.42	31	25.53
5	25.23	14	24.42	23	24.42	32	26.79
6	22.14	15	24.9	24	23.7	33	23.37
7	24.84	16	26.01	25	25.14	34	23.76
8	23.43	17	25.5	26	25.35	35	26.64
9	22.47	18	26.64	27	28.56	36	26.1
10	26.37	20	26.43	30	25.29	37	26.97
Highest= 28.56		**Lowest= 22.14**		**Average = 25.15**			

The students' perception of the content and the practice of the course is supported by the students' midterm scores. Students perceived that the course was very useful for them and that their midterm scores were also high. This indicated that the teachers also perceived that the students' had made progress.

Table 3 Result of 4 weeks observation

Observation categories	Result
Dynamics: 1)Teachers'role	- Review what students have learned from previous period and what student will learn today. - Explain how to pronounce each sound correctly by many ways. - Pronounce sound and let students repeat - Calling every student to speak out one at a time - Let students read the words from their activities : games - Teachers give sentences which contain the resembling sounds - Correct mispronunciation of each student - Let students correct their friend answers - Teachers answer students' questions. - Teachers do not use microphone - Giving reward (snack, candy) - Assigned homework before the period ended.
2)Students' role	- Listening to teachers. - Practicing pronunciation: 1 hour per activities. - Being ready to be called to pronounce different sounds. - Repeating sounds after the teacher pronounced. - Doing activities, pronunciation games. - Taking notes on content. - Talking with friend about lesson - Students acted as the teacher to correct peers' pronunciation
Remark: Both section practice in the same way	
Problem occurred during the observed periods 1)Faced by Teachers	Problem 1: Talkative students but off task Solution 1: reprimanding, or asking students some question. Problem 2 : Students slept in class Solution 2 : asked the students question or asked students to wash face, or ignore

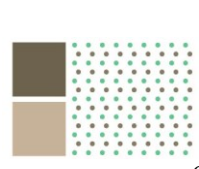|	Problem 3 : Using electronic device Solution3 : Ignore
2)Faced by students	Problem 1 : Misunderstanding of the content Solution 1 : Asking question Problem 2 : Mispronunciation Solution 2 : Try and practice more Problem 3 : Unable to differentiate resembling sound Solution 3 : Ask the teacher to repeat Problem 5 : Being bored Solution 5 : Played with cell phone, talking, or sleep

Result of the teacher's interview

The interview result was from one teacher. He stated that students were allowed many ways to pronounce each English word and sentence correctly such as using visual diagrams, explanations, demonstration and repetition. He hopes that all students somehow would be able to find their own way to pronounce English words and sentence accurately. The teacher further stated that he has designed a new teaching approach for teaching this course called "See-Do-Listen-Speak" approach. The teacher explained that students had to "SEE" him demonstrated how to pronounce each word and sentence correctly. Then the students needed to try to "DO" it; besides, the students always "LISTEN" to the teacher in order to know how to "SPEAK" each word. As for problems, the teacher said that there were no problems faced by the teachers while conducting the teaching. The reason is that there were only a few students who sometimes felt inactive to study the course – this problem rarely happened.

Discussion and Conclusion

Although the result from the questionnaire indicated that students highly appreciated the course content, activities, and the teaching approach, the observation result pointed out that weekly class activities were not varied and interesting to some students. From the five-week observation, the observers saw that the teachers faced a few problems. The problems were some students did not pay attention in class and some were sleeping and that sometimes the problems were ignored. Furthermore, some students continued to misunderstand the content and mispronounced many sounds and could not differentiate the sounds. The sounds that students continued to have problems in pronouncing were: [ʃ], [dʒ], [z], [ʒ], and [tʃ] and similarly the sounds that they agreed that they had problems to identify or differentiate were[ð], [ʒ], [tʃ], [θ], [dʒ], and [ʃ]. As for the teacher's perception towards students' performance, he said that the students' progress was at a satisfactory level; they did quite well. He also pointed out that he has tried to encourage students to practice outside the classroom because only 3 hours a week were not enough to practice English listening and pronunciation.

Based on the belief of the course planners that accuracy is the foundation of effective communication, especially in the EFL context; as a result, accuracy is first to be emphasized and is the main objective of the LP course. The content and the practice of LP course are aimed to build a strong foundation for the first year English major learners (EFL context) to acquire communicative competence in the later semesters. This is why the Audio Lingual Method has been brought back and used with the LP course. Regarding the study, the reflections from different sources showed that the content and the practice of the LP course were appropriate to improve English listening and pronunciation skills of the students in its

context. The only concern was that the redundant activities could become the cause of decreasing learners' motivation. This issue should be discussed and considered among the curriculum and course planners, so that the potential problem can be minimized.

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