

An investigation of the shadowing technique in teaching speaking to English as a Foreign Language students

Pwint Yee Win

National Center for English Language, Yangon, Myanmar

pwintyeewin@uy.edu.mm

Abstract

This article presents a quantitative pilot study that investigates the effectiveness of the use of the shadowing technique in teaching speaking to students studying English as a foreign language. The research participants were in-service EFL teachers or students. Shadowing is an active and highly cognitive activity in which learners track the speech they hear and vocalize it as clearly as possible while simultaneously listening. It also reinforces the phonological coding and their speech perception. Previous studies have shown that the use of the pre-shadowing technique can improve the learner's listening and speaking skills. In this article, the shadowing technique focuses on the correct use of the stress pattern. Using recordings of the participants' speech, it aims to discover whether the use of shadowing techniques – both pre-shadowing and post-shadowing – improve the students' listening and speaking in terms of stress pattern. The results show that shadowing is an effective activity to improve both speaking and listening skills, as it allows participants to become aware of the importance of stress pattern in speaking through listening and vocalization.

Introduction

In teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), all four skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening should be integrated in a balanced way so students can develop effective communication skills. Focusing on just one skill at a time may not be helpful for students as they have to use more than one skill when they try to communicate in reality. Reading and listening are receptive skills while speaking and writing are productive skills. For EFL learners, the productive skills are challenging to develop, especially when they have little exposure to the language. While it is difficult for language courses to balance all four skills in one lesson, when the four skills are integrated, there should be a particular focus on the meaningfulness of the exercises, to improve focus and motivation. (Nation, 2008) Shadowing is a skill-integrated activity as both speaking and listening skills are involved in this activity. Shadowing is an active and highly cognitive activity in which learners track the speech they hear and vocalize it as clearly as possible while simultaneously listening. (Hamada, 2014). It also reinforces the phonological coding and their speech perception. The research presented in this article investigates the effectiveness of the use of the shadowing technique in teaching speaking to EFL students, focusing particularly on the use of stress pattern. It is a small pilot study with three trainee EFL teachers and students as participants. The main data source was

recordings of the participants speaking English, as well as some brief interviews. Once the literature and the methods have been considered below, the article will explain the approach to data analysis, results and discussion. It will conclude with a summary and final remarks.

Literature Review and Key Concepts

Speaking and pronunciation both relate to the same basic activity as both try to convey meaning to the listener. Having good pronunciation can help in normal communication, particularly regarding intelligibility. (Jenkins, 2002) However, communication may fail if the listener misinterprets the message or the speaker mispronounces the words due to unfamiliar sounds or phonology. In order to communicate intelligibly, speakers need to use the appropriate stress. Brown (1992) stated that native speakers can notice stress in a variety of ways, such as when using contractions or indirectly via the absence of stress on words. However, foreign learners cannot be expected to automatically know the stress and therefore it is necessary for foreign learners to learn the stress pattern and phonological features.

According to Katamba (1992), stress is primarily a matter of greater auditory prominence and it is essentially a perceptual phenomenon. Stressed syllables tend to have a higher pitch and longer duration than their non-stressed counterparts. They may also be louder than unstressed syllables. From a phonological angle, there is word stress and sentence stress. Speakers use stress to convey meaning to the listeners and to emphasize certain information. Therefore, English language students need to learn the stress pattern in order to have better speaking and listening skills.

There are many activities that can be used to enhance speaking and listening skills, including 4-3-2, information gaps, and shadowing. This study focuses on shadowing, which was used as a potential way to enhance the students' knowledge of stress patterns as part of teaching pronunciation. There are many studies which focus on the shadowing activity for listening and speaking. Unlike repetition, which allows silent pauses for cognitive activities, shadowing does not give time for meaning but rather enhances phonology. (Hamada, 2015) Kadota (2007) claims that shadowing enhances the students' speech perception, increases their working memory capacity, and strengthens the rehearsal process. Some studies carried out in an EFL context in Japan showed that shadowing is effective for improving listening comprehension skills. Murphey (2001) carried out conversational shadowing which involved 'complete' shadowing, 'selective' shadowing and 'interactive shadowing'. They argue that shadowing may be a 'fence rider' strategy, balanced between deliberate and automatized language use as shadowers are able to sound relatively fluent, beyond their individual competences, and stretch their abilities. Moreover, shadowing allows the listener to hear everything twice, providing more natural weight to the utterance from hearing and producing it. Kadota (2012) introduces two types of shadowing: pre-shadowing (shadowing before learning the lesson content) and post-shadowing (shadowing after learning the lesson content). In pre-shadowing, learners can deliberately focus on the incoming sounds because those sounds comprise the only information on which they can rely. In post-shadowing, being familiar with the target passage can ease learners' anxiety (Hamada, 2011b), which consequently lowers the psychological costs of shadowing. Against this background, the author was interested to explore whether shadowing is an effective technique to use in teaching receptive skills, through studying learners' improvement in producing the correct stress by using this technique.

Method

Research Design

This study was guided by the following research question: Does the use of shadowing techniques improve the students' listening and speaking in terms of stress pattern? Drawing from a range of previous studies (Hamada, 2015; Guerrero & Commander, 2013), I decided to design a small pilot study using mixed methods. It employed two texts which were suitable for participants' level of English. The two audio tapes and texts used in this article were taken from YouTube. Both texts were the diaries of a girl talking about her job and lasted for up to 1 minute 30 seconds. Both audio script and text were used to practice the pre and post-shadowing activities. The participants were also asked to do a short interview to find out their perceptions of the use of the shadowing technique. A percentage count was used in order to represent the improvement in producing the stress pattern.

Participants and setting

I recruited three participants for the study who were quite different from each other as, after attending a course with students from ASEAN, I became curious about whether there would be differences in their skill development. The study involved three participants, allowing the examination of both pre- and post-shadowing. Two participants were from Cambodia attending a teacher training course at the Regional English Language Center (RELC), Singapore. Both are now working at a teacher training center in Cambodia. The third participant was a female participant from South Korea who had been working in Singapore for nearly three years. She was taking the online course for English Literature. The estimated proficiency level of each participant was intermediate. The research was carried out at the RELC computer lab.

Tasks

There were two types of shadowing in this study: pre-shadowing and post-shadowing. There are three steps in the pre-shadowing activity, also known as top-down shadowing. The learners first practiced the shadowing before they studied the stress pattern. They listened to the recording for the first time without the text. They then listened to and mumbled the speech twice in the second step (the practice stage). Until this stage, they still hadn't had the chance to read the text and to study the stress pattern. In the last step of the pre-shadowing stage, the participants shadowed the recording with the reading passage. The participants then had time to study the stress pattern with the video which explained the nature of the stressed pattern in the sentences. They could watch the video again and could take notes. Participants were then given the reading passage before listening. They had to underline the stressed words in the sentences before they listened. They could use the dictionary for unfamiliar words. In the post-reading stage, the participants listened to the recording for the first time and mumbled two times without looking at the reading passage. In the last stage, the participants listened and shadowed the reading text with the correct stressed pattern that they had underlined. More detail on the procedure can be found in the appendix.

Human ethics

Cohen et al. (2007) points out that ethical considerations are more than just procedural as they permeate the entire research process and are an important consideration in framing the research design. Taking ethical considerations into account, the participants of this study were informed in detail about the purpose and the procedure of the investigation before they agreed to take part. They were issued with the human ethics information sheet and were asked to sign the required consent forms. Moreover, the names of the participants remained anonymous and pseudonyms were used to address them so as to maintain their anonymity and confidentiality.

Data analysis approach

In the pre-shadowing activity, participants are asked to shadow the recording three times without having any knowledge about the stress pattern. In the post-shadowing activity, participants shadowed the recording three times after having watched a video clip explaining the stress pattern. The stressed words in the texts were calculated first and the participants' correctly stressed words were calculated in the pre-shadowing and post-shadowing stages afterwards. In this article, only the first and last rounds were counted because the participants were asked to follow the tape without text in the first instance and then followed the listening with text the final round. The percentage of correctly stressed words produced by the participants was calculated. The difference between the first and last times in both pre- and post-shadowing were analyzed in order to find out the improvement in producing the stress pattern. The percentage of the first time shadowing in the pre-shadowing stage and the percentage of the last time shadowing in the post-shadowing stage were also compared. The learners' perception of the use of the shadowing activity was also analyzed through an interview with the participants after the activity.

Results

Pre shadowing	Stressed words	Participant 1	%	Participant 2	%	Participant 3	%
First time	82	46	56%	38	46%	46	56%
Last time		57	70%	36	44%	57	70%
Post shadowing	Stressed words	Participant 1	%	Participant 2	%	Participant 3	%
First time	77	54	70%	42	55%	41	53%
Last time		60	78%	68	88%	70	91%

Table 1 Shadowing test scores for the pre- and post-shadowing

In the pre-shadowing activity, there were 82 stressed words altogether in the listening. The participants were requested to shadow or repeat after listening for the first time without looking at the text. In the first time shadowing, the first participant could repeat 46 stressed words, the second participant 38 and the third participant 46. Therefore, it appears that the participants could shadow over 50% of the original listening the first time round. In the last round of listening within the pre-shadowing activity, the number of stressed words the participants could shadow rose significantly.

The participants could read the text while they were listening to and repeating the recording. In the last activity, out of 82 words the first participant could repeat 57 stressed words, the second 36 and the third participant 57. The percentage rose to 70% for the two participants in the last round of the pre-shadowing activity. Only one participant declined to 44% compared with the first round. Therefore, the results show that the participants improved their performance after listening to the recording and practicing with the text three times.

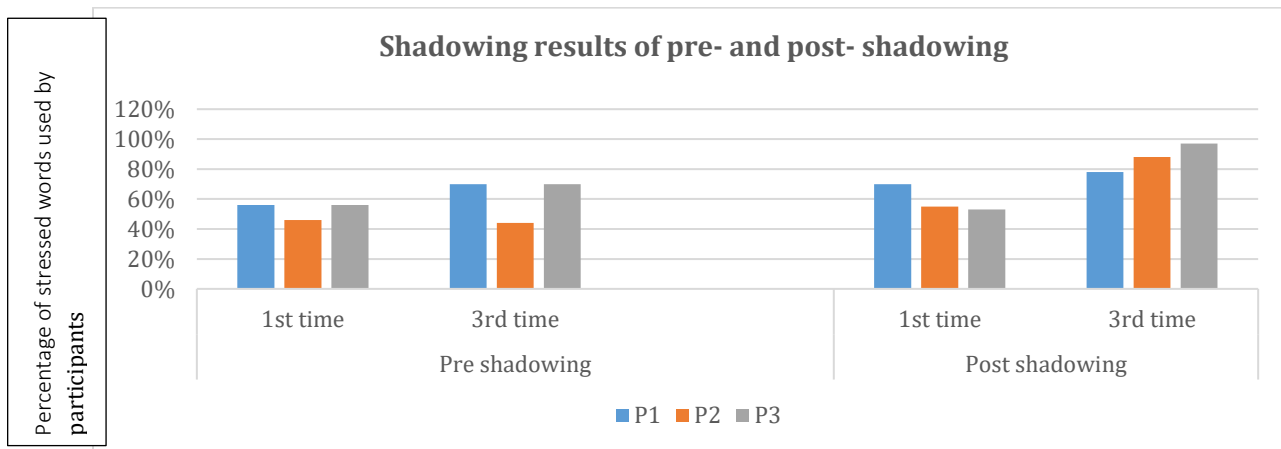


Figure 1 Shadowing results of pre- and post-shadowing

In the post-shadowing activity, participants were asked to shadow the listening three times. There are altogether 77 stressed words in the post-shadowing listening activity. Even though the number of stressed words in the post-shadowing listening activity is lower than the pre-shadowing listening activity, the number of stressed words the students could repeat rose significantly. In the first round of the post-shadowing activity, the first participant could foreshadow 54 stressed words without looking at the text, the second 42 and the third 41.

Before the post-shadowing activity, participants were asked to watch the explanatory video and in the last round of the post-shadowing activity, participants could look at the text while following the recording. In that round, they were able to follow the recording with the correct stress pattern easily. The first participant could repeat 66 stressed words, the second 68 and the third 70. Two participants got over 50% and one got 70% the first time, rising sharply to 78%, 88% and 97% in the last round of shadowing. The results indicate that the participants improved noticeably in the last round of post-shadowing. However, participant 2's result declined in the third round of pre-shadowing and participant 3's result dropped in the first round of post-shadowing. Nevertheless, even though the results of the participants were not stable, it can be concluded that all the participants made improvement in noticing the stress pattern in English. The results can be found in Figure 1.

Discussion

The participants significantly improved their performance in terms of stress pattern. The following reasons might account for this result.

First, the learning of the target language improved between the pre-shadowing and post-shadowing because learning the target contents (the stress pattern) activated the semantic (understanding of

meaning) and phonological information (sound system) contained in the target contents. As the participants had learned the target language, it was easier for them to produce the correct stress pattern. Moreover, accurate phonological information was then transferred to the students' long-term memory, which enhanced their learning (as shown by Hamada, 2015). Participants understood what stress pattern was and they came to notice the stress pattern in the listening activities, so it was easier for them to shadow in the last round of post-shadowing. Moreover, according to McDonough and Trofimovich, (2009), the prime stimulation (i.e., the vocabulary and target contents they learned) might enhance the target stimulation (i.e. the vocabulary and target contents they shadowed), leading to improvement in listening comprehension. Exposure to the target language can enhance performance because the participants have already learned the stress pattern in sentences. Sometimes, participants misremembered or did not notice the importance of the stress pattern. According to the interviews, the participants mentioned that they found it difficult to follow the listening for the very first time as they were not familiar with the content. Once they came to notice and remember the content well, it was easier for them to shadow the stress pattern correctly.

Second, the participants' shadowing with and without text showed different results. In the first round of pre and post-shadowing, the participants shadowed without text and in the last round, they shadowed with text. The use of text could have had an effect on the participant's performance as they could see what they were listening to and they could anticipate what would come next, thereby reducing their anxiety. According to Guerrero and Commander (2013), shadow reading helps learners make the necessary systematic transition from external actions to internal processes, as the basis of mental development within organized instruction. Moreover, shadow reading provides repeated opportunities for internalizing language segments through verbalization. Therefore, the results indicate that learners will remember and understand the phonological features of the listening if they shadow with the text. During the interview, Participant 1 also mentioned that for the first time, she could not remember anything and could use stress only when she practiced with the text.

Lastly, the process of top-down and bottom-up shadowing also needs to be considered. In pre-shadowing, the participants could focus on the sounds at the beginning which was the only information they could rely on and this practice could enhance their speech perception skills. In post-shadowing, the participants did not pay much attention to the sounds and they focused on the cognitive resources between phonology and the rules that they had just learned (see Kadota, 2007). Therefore, it can be argued that pre and post-shadowing activities should be combined as the learners can familiarize themselves with the technique. Moreover, post-shadowing should be practiced only after the learners have got the basic idea of sound. If not, they may lose interest in the imitation of the input and just focus on the rules they have learned.

Summary and conclusions

This article explored the value of using the shadowing technique, with a focus on stress pattern, as a way of teaching speaking to EFL learners. It presented small-scale pilot research conducted with teachers and students of EFL, using two given texts. The shadowing method is regarded as an effective method of teaching listening and speaking as learners can shadow the listening first and then imitate or shadow the listening with reference to the text. It can also integrate the listening and

speaking skills as the participants are asked to vocalize what they hear. In this activity, they need to focus on both listening and speaking, and so it can be challenging for them. The participants in this study were asked to shadow the listening without text for the first time but with text for the third time. The results of this study indicate that the participants improved their performance in producing the stress pattern because of the activation of prior knowledge which can enhance long-term memory. This study also demonstrates that shadowing with and without text can also have an effect on their performance. It is recommended, therefore, that students start with pre-shadowing and then move to post-shadowing. In conclusion, it can be said that shadowing is an effective technique in integrating the listening and speaking skills of EFL learners.

References

- Brown, A. (1992). *Approaches to Pronunciation Teaching* (Vol. 2). Macmillan Publishers Limited.
- Brown, Gillian. (1990). *Listening to Spoken English*. (2nd edition). Longman.
- Carney, Edward. (1994). *A Survey of English Spelling*. Routledge.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education* (6th ed.). New York: Routledge.
- De Guerrero, M. C., & Commander, M. (2013) Shadow-reading: Affordances for imitation in the language classroom. *Language Teaching Research*, 17(4), 433–453.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168813494125>
- Gilbert, Judy. (2000). *Clear Speech from the Start*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hamada, Y. (2011b). Torikumi yasui shadowing hoho no kenkyu [A study on a learner-friendly shadowing procedure]. *Journal of the Japan Association for Developmental Education*, 6(1), 71–78.
- Hamada, Y. (2015). Shadowing: Who Benefits and How? Uncovering a Booming EFL Teaching Technique for Listening Comprehension. *Language Teaching Research*, 20(1), 35–52.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168815597504>
- Hamada, Yo. "The effectiveness of pre-and post-shadowing in improving listening comprehension skills." *The Language Teacher* 38.1 (2014): 3-10.
- Jenkins, J. (2002). A sociolinguistically based, empirically researched pronunciation syllabus for English as an international language. *Applied linguistics*, 23(1), 83-103.
- Katamba, F. (1989). *An introduction to phonology*. London; New York: Longman.
- Kadota, S. (2007). Shadowing to ondoku no kagaku [Science of shadowing and oral reading]. *Tokyo: Cosmopier*.
- Kadota, S. (2012). Shadoing to ondoku to eigoshutoku no kagaku [Science of shadowing, oral reading, and English acquisition]. Tokyo: Cosmopier.
- McDonough, K., & Trofimovich, P. (2009). *Using priming methods in second language*

research. New York: Routledge.

McKay, H. and A. Tom. (1999) *Teaching Adult Second Language Learners*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 170.

Murphey, T. (2001). Exploring conversational shadowing. *Language Teaching Research*, 5(2), 128–155.

Nation, I. N. J. (2008). *Teaching ESL/EFL Listening and Speaking*. Florence: Taylor and Francis.
Retrieved from <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/vuw/detail.action?docID=355868>

Schmidt, R. 1990: The role of consciousness in second language acquisition. *Applied Linguistics* 11(2): 129–58.

Appendix

No.	Procedure	Instruction
1.	Participants first listen to the passage first time without the text.	Now I would like you to listen to the tape. You don't need to do anything and just listen to the tape and try to familiarize with the listening.
2.	Participants then mumble the text twice (silently shadow the incoming sounds without text)	Now you can listen to the tape twice and if you want to you can shadow the tape. But one thing here is that the tape won't stop in the middle so you need to repeat after everything you have heard.
3.	Participants shadow the reading passage while listening to the tape.	Now I will give you the passage of the tape and you need to repeat after the tape while you are reading the passage.
4.	Participants silently read the instruction for stress pattern and explanation for stress pattern. Check understanding to clarify difficult sounds and patterns. Then try to mark the stress pattern in the text.	My intention in this research is the stress pattern, so I would like you to watch this YouTube video which explains the stress pattern in English. What you have to do is watch the video and if you want to watch it again, you can tell me. I will give you the passage you are going to listen to. What I want you to do is just mark the stress pattern in the text on the words which are stressed.
5.	Participants listen to the passage without the text.	If you are ready, shall we listen to the tape? As with the first time, you can listen to the first time and next two times, you need to mumble the tape without text. Please don't look at the text for the first three rounds.
7.	Participants mumble the tape twice without text.	
8.	Participants shadow the tape with text.	Now you can look at your text and repeat after the tape.

About the author

Pwint Yee Win

National Center for English Language, Yangon, Myanmar

Pwint Yee Win is now working as a lecturer at National Center for English Language at University of Yangon. She has got her first MA from University of Yangon in 2012 and her second MA in TESOL from University of Victoria, Wellington in 2017. She is now doing PhD dissertation in the area of English as Medium of Instruction in Higher Education. She is interested in English Language Teaching Methodology, the development of training modules for student-centered curriculum and course design and also motivated to conduct researches in English Language Teaching.

DOI

British Council
10 Spring Garden,
London SW1A 2BN
United Kingdom

© British Council 2020

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities.

