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Improving Linkage of Sounds for 1st year English Majors through Dubbing Documentary Films

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ABSTRACT

It is important to link sounds in English to speak naturally and fluently like native speakers; however, Vietnamese students often encounter the problems of sound linkage. This study aims at finding out whether to use dubbing documentary films on improving linkage of sounds for 1st year English majors. The specific objectives are to evaluate the impact of dubbing documentary films on students' sound linkage capacity and to collect the students' feedback with regard to their attitudes to dubbing documentary film activities, the benefits and possible solutions to enhance the effectiveness of dubbing documentary film technique. The study was carried out using quasi-experimental research design and survey. The participants in the study consist of 42 students in which 20 students were selected randomly to participate in the experimental group (dubbing documentary films), and 22 of them were assigned to the control group (non-dubbing documentary films). While all these 42 students were requested to sit for pre-tests and post-tests, only students in experimental group answered the questions concerning the difficulties when dubbing films. The results reveal that there was a significant enhancement of the students' performance in pronouncing skill in the aspect of sound linkage after applying dubbing documentary films activities. Moreover, students' feedback on the use of the method is generally positive, and suggestions for reducing the obstacles when dubbing documentary films are provided to enhance the utilization of the method more meaningfully and efficiently.

Keywords: dubbing documentary films, English majors, linkage of sounds

I. INTRODUCTION

Learning foreign languages has become a trend for any young person. Simply, if you can communicate with other people only by your mother tongue, you may lose the opportunity to work in multinational companies and reduce the ability to compete directly with candidates who are fluent in other languages, especially English. However, how to speak English like a

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native? Beside gaining a wide vocabulary resource, acquiring a wide range of grammatical structures flexibly, we need to have good pronunciation as pronunciation contributes to the perceived competence of a speaker. According to Dalton & Seidlhofer (1994) "Pronunciation is the action of producing sounds of speech to communicate a message." In other words, pronunciation is crucial to proper communication as producing the wrong pronunciation makes the recipient misunderstand the information. But is good pronunciation just 'how words and letters sound'? It is much more than that. In order to obtain good pronunciation, it is necessary for one to focus on practicing his or her intonation, stress and connected speech for producing natural speech.

Concerning connected speech, one can easily master this feature when he or she gets familiar with it right after the first days studying English. However, it is often the problem of the majority of Vietnamese students who are not often guided to focus on the use of linking sounds when learning the language. Furthermore, the influence of the mother tongue makes the learners forget the use of this feature when producing this language as Vietnamese language doesn't contain linking sounds. And it is also a monosyllabic language which does not require to pronounce the ending sounds, so that, there is no linking sounds between the ending consonant of the previous word to the beginning vowel of the following word. That's the reason why many Vietnamese students have difficulties in producing linking sounds in English like native speakers.

To conduct the research, the researchers searched solutions to improve the students' pronunciation focusing on sound linkage by using the technique of dubbing documentary films. The specific objectives are to evaluate the impact of dubbing documentary films on students' sound linkage capacity and to collect the students' feedback with regard to their attitudes to dubbing documentary film activities, the benefits and possible solutions to enhance the effectiveness of dubbing documentary film technique.

II. IDENTIFY, RESEARCH AND COLLECT IDEA

(A) Key concepts

Linkage of sounds

Generally, the term linkage of sound can be the adjustment of speakers when producing words in connected speech (Goodwin, 2001). However, many researchers have agreed with the idea that linkage of sounds happens when two words are connected by joining the last sound of the previous word to the first sound of the following word (Brown & Kondo-Brown, 2006b; Celce-Murcia, Brinton, Goodwin, & Griner, 2010; Gimson, 1989; Hieke, 1984).

In conversational English, the words in phrases and short sentences should be linked together as if they were one word (Paulette Dale, Lillian Poms, 1994). Sounds are also diminished or omitted entirely when words are tied together in this way. Only in conversational speech does the linking of word sounds occur. For examples:

“stand up” = [stændʌp].

In the present study, the definition of linkage of sounds in preference to others is the connection of two words in which an ending consonant sound of previous word is linked to a beginning vowel sound of the following word to create a new syllable structure.

Dubbing documentary films

Nichols B., 2010 agreed that "Documentary films speak about actual situations or events and honor known facts; they do not introduce new, unverifiable ones. They speak directly about the historical world rather than allegorically." According to Kuhn, A. & Westwell, G. (2012), documentary films “deals with actual and factual issues, institutions, and people”.

Dubbing documentary films, in this research, is the process of adding new dialogue or other sounds to the sound track of documentary films that has already been shot with subtitles. The documentary films chosen are short, interesting and are at the right level of the students.

(B) Types of Linkage

Consonant-to-vowel linking (C-V)

It takes place when the final consonant of a word is followed by a vowel in the same thought group. It is often pronounced as a medial consonant, i.e. a consonant occurring in the middle of a word, such as [s]:

face it [feɪ.sɪt]

When the final consonant is a part of a consonant cluster, it is usually pronounced as though it belonged to the following word. In this case, linking helps to split and simplify the cluster (Hewings & Goldstein, 1998) in which the consonant that is moved over /t/ is weakly released and not aspirated, as in this example:

Salt and pepper [sɔl.təmpɛpə]

Vowel-to-vowel linking (V-V)

It occurs when a word that ends in a high and mid-tense vowel is followed by a word that begins with a vowel. Speakers, thereafter, insert a very short /w/ or /j/ sound to link the two vowels together and avoid a gap between the sounds (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). The choice

of the linking glide depends on the vowel at the end of the first word. If the first word ends with a high front vowel, such as / i: /, then the linking sound will be /j/ as in the example:

pay a lot [peij ə. l ɒt]

However, if the word ends with a high back vowel, such as / u:/, then the two words are linked with /w/, for example:

Now I [naʊ wai]

Consonant-to-consonant linking (C-C)

It can take place when two identical consonants meet at word boundaries and pronounced as one slightly prolonged sound, for example:

can name [kə. n:eim]

When the two border consonants are otherwise different, the final consonant of a word is then released at the beginning of the following word, such as /t/ in the following example:

what she [wa.tʃi]

The present study will only use the first two types of linking in the experiment. C-C linking is more complex and can be tricky to identify and categorize; therefore, its study is beyond the scope of this research.

(C) Previous research

There have been many studies conducted to measure the effectiveness of using films to improve students' pronunciation. An action research was carried out in Indonesia by Firdaus Ditya Pamungkas et. al. (2019). The research aims to find out the impact of video dubbing on improving students' speaking pronunciation. The findings showed that the implementation of video dubbing in learning process has beneficial effect on students' speaking skill, especially in pronunciation.

Another action research was done by Titik Lina Widyaningsih (2017) with the aim to improve the students' pronunciation ability using Animated Films. Two cycles were made from October until December at the first semester students of English Department of STKIP PGRI Tulungagung, in Indonesia. Techniques used to collect data were observation, interview, and test (pre-test and post-test). The research findings prove that Animated Films could improve the first semester students' pronunciation ability.

Reggy Rayasa (2018) investigated the Use of English Movie to Enhance Tenth Grade Students' Pronunciation at SMA Angkasa 2, East Jakarta. 35 tenth graders participated in the study. The

research found out that using movies as teaching media is an effective way to improve students' pronunciation skills. Therefore, it is recommended to use movies as an alternative media to develop students' pronunciation skills.

Khan, A. (2015) conducted a research on the effectiveness of exposure to films on improving the speaking skills of non-native English language learners. According to the research results, audiovisual technologies, such as films, generally are a great source for teaching English speaking skill and are more suitable for non-native English language learning contexts.

In Vietnam, Tran Thi Hai Yen carried out a project on Using Movie Dubbing to Improve Natural English Pronunciation Skills. movie-dubbing project brings the real world into the classroom and helps students speak English more naturally. The students felt that it was useful in developing their fluency and intonation.

It is clear that there are many studies in relation to using films in teaching English and the results are universal, that is to improve students' pronunciation mastery. However, there are rare research on specific types of films such as documentary can be used in order to develop students' linkage of sound, one aspect of pronunciation. Therefore, this research was carried out to evaluate the impact of using this type of movie on our students' linkage of sounds.

III. METHODOLOGY

(A) Research design

The present study used experimental research design, which includes experimental group and control group to evaluate the impact of using documentary on our students' linkage of sounds. Then a survey was conducted to find out students' feedback on their attitudes to dubbing documentary film activities, the benefits and possible solutions to enhance the effectiveness of this technique.

(B) Participants

A class of 42 non-English majors at Thai Nguyen University of Education (TNUE) who were invited to take part in the study. 20 of them were assigned to the experimental group (dubbing documentary group) while the others were assigned into the control group (non- dubbing documentary group).

All of these students were required to take a pre-test and post-test while only the experimental group did the survey questionnaire on feedback of dubbing documentary film activity and recommendations for better organization of the activity.

(C) Data collection instruments

Pre-test: Prior to the experiment, the participants (both experimental and control groups) were given a documentary film which they had to look at the subtitle of the film and dub. The researchers recorded their voice of dubbing for analysis.

Post-test: At the end of the experiment, the same documentary film of the pre-test was given to the students as the post-test. The researchers recorded their voice of dubbing the post-test documentary film for analysis.

The researchers designed pre-post tests to collect data about the students' performance on linkage of sounds before taking the intervention, and then to gather the same data after the intervention. In this study, the pre-post tests design assists the researchers to make inferences on the impact of dubbing documentary films compilation on students' sound linking ability basing on the pre-test and post-test results.

The tests were based on a short documentary film provided by the researchers. The students were asked to dub the same documentary film which was 3 minutes long. The researchers recorded students' voice while they were dubbing the film, which was carried out on the first and the last week of the experiment. The recordings were then analyzed to find out the difference between the results.

The interview was conducted to gather students' ideas about their attitudes toward dubbing documentary films.

The post-questionnaires were also designed to collect students opinions on their advantages and difficulties of dubbing documentary films, and recommendations to better organization of the activity.

Dubbing documentary films process

The experiment took place in a semester of a academic year. Class K55B including 42 non English major students at Thai Nguyen University of Education, Vietnam took part in the study, in which 20 of them were asked to dub documentary films with English subtitles. The films selected were related to the topics of the units in the textbook that they were using and had pre-intermediate level of vocabulary. In the first week of the experiment, the students in the experimental group were guided how to dub documentary films and were taught the types of linking sounds in English and how to pronounce them. The following weeks, the students were given a documentary film every week and practiced dubbing. After practicing dubbing many times, the students recoded the film dubbed and sent it to the researchers via google classroom. The students then received comments on the dubbing product from the researchers for better dubbing films and linking sounds. Although there were plenty types of sounds linkage, the

researchers focused students to practice mainly the consonant-to-vowel linking and vowel-to-vowel linking types as mentioned previously.

The students practiced dubbing documentary films as described in the table below.

Names of documentary films	Process of practicing dubbing documentary films
<i>Film 1: I am a flower</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Give a documentary film to watch and identify of sounds linkage by looking at the subtitles while watching the film. - Practice dubbing at least three times at home. - Record the film dubbed. - Submit the recording via google classroom. - Feedback on the linkage of sounds provided.
<i>Film 02: Nature is speaking</i>	
<i>Film 03: Advice from Robbins William</i>	
<i>Film 04: Internet for all of us</i>	
<i>Film 05: What do humans need to stay healthy?</i>	
<i>Film 06: The ballad of the infantry</i>	

During the implementation of dubbing documentary films, the researchers guided and supported the students to recognize the sound linkage from the videos as well as provided comments and suggestions for the students' recordings on a weekly basis. On the last week of the experiment, the researchers organized a competition on dubbing documentary films. The competitors, 5 teams, were all students from experimental group who took part in three sections of the game namely matching the individual words with the correct pronunciation, recognizing the number of sounds linkage in a saying, and dubbing a documentary film. The game was organized with the aim at encouraging students to speak naturally like native speakers with the focus on sounds linkage and this might be an excellent practice for them to get better results in pronunciation.

Student feedback questionnaire

Firstly, the researchers required all the students to write down what they felt about dubbing documentary films. Based on their feedback, the questionnaire was then designed to gather the participants' feedback on their attitudes toward the dubbing documentary film, advantages and difficulties they encountered while dubbing documentary films, and propose possible solutions to enhance the effectiveness of dubbing documentary films in improving the students' sound linking ability. The questionnaire was designed in a mixed format, including 3-point Likert statements, close-ended questions and open-ended questions.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

(A) The impacts of dubbing documentary films on students’ linking sound ability.

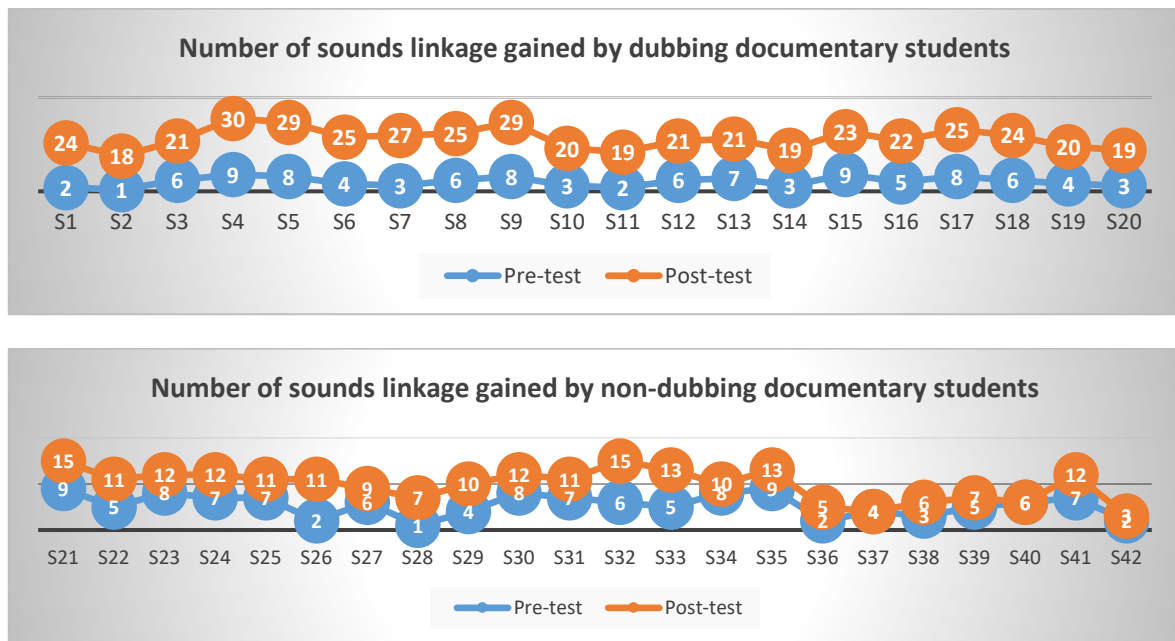


Figure 1. Sounds linkage test scores of students

The diagrams show that there is a bigger gap between the number of sounds gained by experimental group (dubbing documentary group) and control group (non-dubbing documentary group). To be specific, both groups have relatively low pre-test scores, ranking from 1 to 9 linking sounds. However, after practicing linking sounds by dubbing documentary films, the total number of sounds linkage improved significantly. It is clearly seen that the post-test scores gained by the dubbing documentary film group vary from 19 to 30, while the scores of the same test type of non - dubbing documentary group are much lower from 2 to 15.

In order to have more analysis, the average scores of sound linkage by students are computed and shown in the following bar chart.

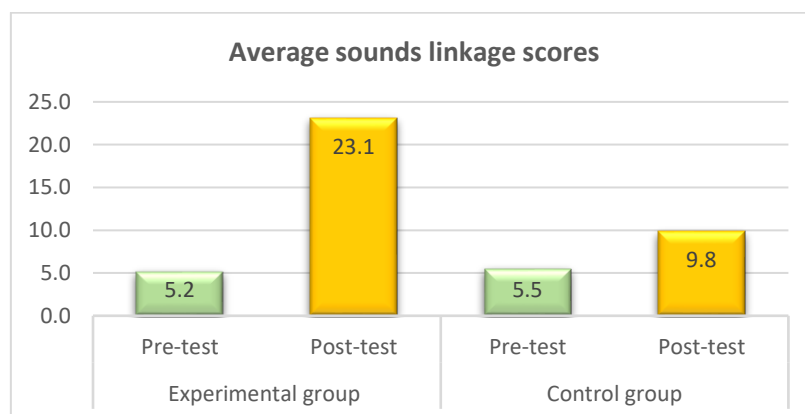


Figure 2. Average sounds linkage scores of students

It is visible from the bar chart that there is a difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of both control group and experimental group. However, the much bigger gap can be noticeable in the post-test scores of experimental group than that of the control group. In details, the average scores of pre-tests of experimental group and control group are nearly the same, which are 5.2 and 5.5 respectively. After taking part in the dubbing documentary films, the experimental group gains much higher average scores of the post-test than that of the control group. In other words, the average scores of the post-test of the experimental group is 23,1 while that scores of the control group is merely 9.8. The big gap can be seen between these two group scores is 13.3. Thus, it can be concluded that the method of dubbing documentary films could improve students' sounds linkage ability.

(B) Students' feedback on dubbing documentary films

Students' attitude toward dubbing documentary films

In order to get information on students' attitudes to dubbing documentary films, five students in experimental group were interviewed questions about their preference, confidence and the usefulness of dubbing documentary films. The results reveal that all of them strictly followed the requirements of the class. They all practiced reading the subtitles of the video many times before dubbing it and submitted the dubbed video on time. Three out of five students comprising students 1,2,4 said that they really enjoyed dubbing documentary films and continued doing it after finishing the experiment. It is interesting to note that all the interviewees were familiar with sounds linkage and felt more confident in pronunciation. They all agreed that the method of dubbing documentary film was a useful self-study tool and should be applied widely except one student found that when asking students to dub a film, teachers should choose the films which are in the right level of the students. Based on this opinion, the researchers would recheck the documentary films and opt the more suitable ones again.

Students' opinions on the advantages of dubbing documentary films

The researchers conducted a survey questionnaire on the students' feedback after the experiment of dubbing documentary films. Concerning the opinions on the advantages of dubbing documentary films, all of the students assured that it improved their linking sounds ability (100%), and more than half of them agreed that it enriched their vocabulary (60%). Besides, they added more benefits as stated below:

Dubbing documentary films		Frequency
1	help them identify stress in a sentence	5
2	help them recognise sounds in a word	1
3	help them relax	4
4	increase their knowledge	2
5	make them feel proud because they can help their friends	2
6	make them more confident in speaking English	4
7	motivate them to speak English	2
8	train their tongue to speak English	1

Students' difficulties when dubbing documentary films and their suggestions for better organization of the activity

After the experiment, the researchers asked students from dubbing documentary films group to answer the questionnaires on the difficulties they encountered when dubbing documentary films and provide possible solutions to the problems. The results are shown in the following tables.

No	Difficulties	Frequency
1	I could not speak as fast as the spoken speed in the films	2
2	I could not follow the subtitles	1
3	My pronunciation was not good, so that I could not speak fluently and naturally	5
4	I did not recognize linking sounds when dubbing	2
5	It was difficult for me to imitate the intonation of the characters' speech	4
6	My voice was not suitable with the mood of the characters	4
7	My voice is not suitable with the scenes of the film	2
8	I did not have recording equipment for recording my voice	1

No	Suggested solutions	Frequency
1	Teachers should choose video with slower speech	15
2	Students should practice reading the subtitles of the films given by the teachers many times before dubbing the films	20
3	Students should practice dubbing films regularly	18
4	Students should take notes of difficult words or phrases and linking sounds before dubbing films	17
5	Students should take notes of their own mistakes while practicing dubbing a film many times	15

Regarding the difficulties of the students when dubbing documentary films, most of them did not have problems related to the quality of the films. Their most difficulties were their bad pronunciation that led to not being able to speak naturally and fluently. However, the number of the students with this difficulty is not high, accounting for 5 out of 20 students. Some other students could not show the mood of the films' characters and the intonation of the characters' speech.

In order to overcome the above mentioned difficulties, most of the students suggested possible recommendations in relation to choosing films with slower speech, practicing reading the films' subtitles many times and dubbing films regularly, and taking notes of difficult words or mistakes while practicing.

Generally, the interview and survey questionnaires' results reveal that most of the students have positive attitudes toward the dubbing documentary film activity. Although some difficulties are described, many of them agree that dubbing documentary films have brought them plenty of benefits. Moreover, with the suggestions to the problems given above, they can partly reduce the difficulties when dubbing the films.

V. CONCLUSION

The present study attempts to answer the questions related to the effectiveness of dubbing documentary films on students' linkage of sounds. By comparing between the dubbing documentary film group and the non-dubbing documentary film group, the study shows that there is a big difference gap between these two groups in which the dubbing documentary film group has gained much more scores than the other group. This confirms the effectiveness of dubbing documentary film activity. In other words, the dubbing documentary film activity could significantly improve the students' sounds linkage ability.

Moreover, most of the non-English majors have an optimistic attitude toward dubbing documentary film activity. They provided numerous benefits which dubbing documentary film activity brings for them, and the idea that the method of dubbing documentary film should be applied widely was also commented.

Besides the advantages, the participants suggested some possible solutions to the problems related to dubbing documentary film activity which were invested after the experiment. The recommendations focus mainly on the slower speech of the films chosen, and the ways to practice dubbing the films including reading their subtitles many times, taking notes of difficult words, and linking sounds, finding out one's own pronunciation mistakes before dubbing.

Based on the findings with plentiful advantages of utilizing dubbing documentary film activity in improving students' pronunciation, focusing on linkage of sounds, the researchers highly recommend that this method will be utilized widely with the hope of supporting students to communicate in English more naturally.

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