

The Importance of Learning Strong and Weak Forms in Listening Comprehension

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ABSTRACT

The importance of learning strong and weak forms is very much necessary to comprehend the native speakers' fluent speech. Native speakers frequently use weak forms in their speech which makes it difficult for the foreign language learners to comprehend. The purpose of addressing this issue was to find out the actual problems of this issue and to realize students the importance of learning strong and weak forms in listening comprehension. This research is conducted at NUML Islamabad. The research participant are the six students from M.A English 3rd Semester. The research participant is given a written questionnaire to be answered, and a listening test is also conducted to investigate the issue of listening comprehension. I hope the findings and suggestions of research will help the students, learning English as their second language. I also hope that this research will be helpful to the teachers in teaching English to their students.

Keywords: Listening comprehension, strong and weak forms, native speakers, foreign language learners, English as a second language, NUML Islamabad

Introduction

Learning a foreign language is specified as the expertise of the four language skills that are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Listening and reading are labelled as receptive skills and speaking and writing as productive ones. Both skills are equally important but here a quite visible importance is given to the productive ones, ignoring the receptive ones. Listening skill is the focus in this research article.

This research is about the problems faced by Pakistani students while having a discussion with a native English speaker and hence not understanding the weak forms used by native speakers. This research is aimed to find out the actual problems faced by Pakistani students while listening to a native speaker of English by understanding the characteristics of functional words and the rules that govern the use of functional words in English. Some theatrical considerations are also directed about the characteristics of functional words which make them look insignificant in connected speech.

While listening to a native speaker, Pakistani students who can speak English, are unable to comprehend the connected speech of the native speakers because they frequently use weak forms in order to make their speech fluent. Even I, being a student of English, face a lot of difficulties while listening to native speakers when watching movies, news bulletins or other conversations among native speakers of English. Though we are taught about strong and weak forms used by native speakers in their connected speech but still we are unable to comprehend it proficiently.

Students are taught elementary concepts about the ways through which weak forms are used in different settings. The basic source of this information is usually the courses students are taught in the module of phonetics. The main focus of such courses is to show students different variations of pronunciation that each grammatical word has and the rules that govern their actual use i.e. the mode and the context of their use. What students are learning is the 'production' of weak forms. This is significant in the sense that native speakers use weak forms in their speech, and since the students' aim is to speak as naturally as native speakers, learning of these forms helps the task. In addition, the fluency of the language, students will highly depend on their correct use of these forms. More importantly, extensive work with weak forms will facilitate their awareness in natural speech. Students, however, have poor presentation as to the perception of these forms. Even though they have been exposed to the basic concepts that govern the use of weak forms, they still have problems in comprehending them while listening to connected speech. The reason for this, as stated before, might be that the focus in teaching is given more to production rather than reception. It could be also that students are not familiar with the importance of this aspect of connected speech in listening.

Statement of the problem

We, as students, are taught about the basics of weaker forms and how they are used in different scenarios. The focal point of such courses is to show the different pronunciations each grammatical word has, plus the rules which are to be obeyed. In short, they are taught the production of weaker forms. Significance of these courses are that as students want to sound as natural native speaker as possible, learning these weaker forms helps them in doing so. However, these students have problems in understanding these weaker forms even when they are taught the rules. This problem, that might be causing these problems, is ignoring the importance of listening comprehension of these weaker forms.

Objectives

The objectives of this research are to:

1. Understand the problems faced by students while listening to natural native speech.

2. Suggest steps for teaching this specific area of connected speech in an improved manner.

Significance

The reason of bringing this topic under consideration comes from the researcher's personal experience as a student. In daily life, students face difficulties while listening to connected speech especially during dictations. Catching weaker forms in English movies is one of the main problems the researcher has noticed. Teachers who frequently use weaker forms are asked to repeat by students because of the inability to understand them. Due to above reasons, it is necessary to address this problem faced by Pakistani students.

Research Questions

In this research, the effects of discernment and misperception of weak forms of functional words from the part of students on their listening comprehensions will be entertained. Furthermore, these questions will be raised:

1. What are the problems faced by students while listening to natural native speech?
2. What are the steps for teaching this specific area of connected speech in an improved manner?

Delimitation

The researcher has delimited the topic only to Pakistani students. Six students of M.A English (3rd semester Linguistics) from NUML Islamabad are selected through random sampling as research participants. This research will help the Pakistani students to have better comprehension of the stronger and weaker forms used in native speaker's speech

Literature Review

Learners encounter a lot of problems while learning a foreign language. For example, when they face documented texts, songs, direct speech, or even dialogues, they find it difficult to comprehend. This is because of many factors such as native speakers' speed of speech, accent, pitch, and so on. This inability leads to further difficulties in language learning. Due to this reason, they are suggested to be exposed to it by listening to them. That is why listening is thought to be a fundamental skill in language acquisition and learning, and it is to be set up at the topmost of language skills because before you start speaking the language, you must be aware of it and get used to it.

It has been proved through different research that learners of a foreign language face a lot of difficulties in listening comprehension while listening to a native speaker's speech because they frequently use weak forms in order to make their speech fluent. (Brown & Kondo, 2006).

Henrichson (1984, cited in Ito 2006) investigated in his research the effects of using weak forms in learners' listening comprehension of a spoken text. Two dictations were administered; first, a text which was pronounced with

full forms and the second with reduced or weakened forms. The results proved that pronouncing a text with full or reduced forms affects the learners' listening comprehension. Based on these research some experiments were conducted to see the importance of systematic ways of instructing the learners about the use of weak forms in developing their listening comprehension abilities. (1984, cited in Ito 2006)

Matsuzawa (2006) experimented on more than 20 Japanese students of English language hypothesizing that the use of weak forms in spoken language does interfere with learners' listening comprehension. He conducted two tests, pre-test and post-test. In the pre-test, students were given a spoken text, and they were supposed to write down full forms of the sentences. Then, they were taught the use of weak forms used in native speakers' connected speech and later they were given listening cloze exercises for about four (4) hours, which were subdivided into eight (8) sessions (thirty minutes each). A post-test was also given to them with similar instructions and a significant difference was noted in the pre-test and the post-test. Matsuzawa drew the conclusion that the learners' showed significant improvement in their listening comprehension, noticing that this "improvement did not relate to any specific English proficiency, that meant, all participants benefitted about equally from the instruction" (2006: 63).

Brown and Hilferty (2006) also conducted almost the same research to identify the importance of teaching weak forms to the students of EFL. This research included two groups consisting of sixteen (16) students each. The first group (experimental group) was given instructions about the use of weak forms in a systematic way, organizing into ten- minutes daily lessons over a period of four weeks. Using the same timetable, the controlled group was given only pronunciation and discrimination exercises. Later, a post-test was administered to calculate the effectiveness of instruction given to the experimental group. The calculations showed an obvious difference between the experimental and controlled group. Through their research they concluded that teaching weak forms does contribute a lot in listening comprehension. (2006)

The results, mentioned above in different experiments, are noteworthy in many ways. First, they show the importance of teaching weak forms to the students of EFL for language teachers. Secondly, they also underlie some important techniques that can be used for teaching effective listening skills. In Matsuzawa's experiment for the processing modes- top-down and bottom-up – though their effect in the performance in the learners is somehow vague, the importance of these exercises is significant because they raise learners' awareness. (Morley, 1991; Peterson, 1991).

While teaching oral skills to foreign language learners, speaking skill takes a lot of time. Listening skill was primarily totally neglected. (Richards and Renandya, 2000).

It was claimed by Lam that “It is only when learners are aware of the unique characteristics of authentic listening input that they can be equipped with skills to handle real-life communication” (2002: 251).

Peterson (1991), for instance, proposed the usage of “selective listening exercises” based on concentrating learners’ attention on the forms of language while listening. These kinds of exercises are considered by him as principle in listening comprehension in the classes. Taking the fact into consideration that learners do not pay attention to the use of weak forms, articles, prepositions, ending of words etc., he claims that

“Selective listening points draw students’ attention to details of form and encourage accuracy in generating the language system” (1991: 112).

This type of exercises will teach the students the importance of reduced forms in listening comprehension and consequently the reason for learning them will be understood. To help the students in recognizing the unstressed functional words, bottom-up mode is suggested by Peterson (1991) through the usage of multiple-choice questions.

According to Nation & Newton (2009), “learners need to be proficient with those bottom-up processes and learners can benefit from being taught how to listen. (2009:42).

The importance of learning listening skills in language learning has been recently recognized and it is highly emphasized to learn it as a skill. In the co-dimension of learning a language, listening is stressed as the pillar of other skills of language known as speaking. Using effective listening to native speakers, characteristic features of spoken language and pronunciation could be best taught.

Intensive listening tasks have been suggested by Rost (1990) which are based on principle of drawing the attention of students to the features of language such as phonological characteristics. Unlike the Peterson’s methodology, Rost based his focus on the importance of meaning of words and proposed that learners need to focus their attention on the features of language and after that meaning is established. The significant participation of the learners is also stressed by him. He also suggests that learners’ must be given opportunities to argue and ask questions about the features of language. (1990)

In the same way to analyze the aspects of fast connected speech, Morley (1991) proposes that students of EFL should be given opportunities for language analysis tasks. According to him this will enable the learners of foreign/second language to make some personal approaches to cope with “natural contextualized speech”. (1991: 92).

Weak forms that are used in connected speech by native speakers of English are placed in the category of functional words. They have no meaning in the dictionary. They are a few in number and include prepositions, auxiliaries, adverbs, articles, conjunctions etc. their basic purpose is like a bond between

content words as well as upholding connections between higher syntactic components such as clauses and phrases. (Collins and Mees, 2003)

After reading all these research articles, it has been proved that listening comprehension is not an easy job and learners of foreign languages face a lot of difficulties in listening comprehension while listening to native speakers' connected speech.

In this research, the researcher is going to find out the problems faced by Pakistani students in their listening comprehension while learning English as foreign language. The researcher is going to conduct this research in English (GS) department at NUML, Islamabad. After finding the reasons for this inability in listening comprehension, the researcher will suggest some affective steps that should be taken in teaching this specific area.

Research Methodology

In this research, the researcher is going to analyze Pakistani students' abilities in listening comprehension to native speakers' connected speech. The focus of this research is on weak forms. The study consists of a Questionnaire which includes both, open ended and close ended questions. The first section of the questionnaire includes two open ended questions and eight close ended questions to collect sufficient data to be analyzed. A listening test will also be conducted to evaluate the research participants' ability to recognize the weaker forms in natural speech. By doing so, we will analyze whether students have any problems in listening to these weaker forms. The researcher will also question the sufficiency of the knowledge they have about weaker forms. The researcher will analyze the major problems that students face in listening to weaker forms through the analysis of their performances.

Research design

In this research study, the researcher has used quantitative as well as qualitative approach to collect the data from his selected sample.

Population

The population of this research study are the students of master's level from Graduate Studies Department (GS) studying at National University of Modern Languages.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

In this research study, data is collected from six students of third (3rd) semester master's level class in order to get authentic results. Simple random sampling technique is used to select the sample.

Tools

The following tools are used in this research.

1. A listening test of five minutes duration is conducted to observe the research participants' ability to comprehend the native speakers' connected speech in which they have frequently used weak forms.

2. A questionnaire, consisting of two (2) open ended and eight (8) close ended questions, is made as a tool in this current research to collect data from the participants.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data is collected by using a questionnaire and using a listening test, consisting of five minutes connected speech. The evaluation of the students' performances in this test is based on the number of correct/incorrect answers. The researcher will sum up the correct answers, given by the students and use them as their final score. The number of recognized/unrecognized answers will determine the outcome of the test.

Theoretical Framework

This study is about the importance of learning strong and weak forms in listening comprehension. Henrichsen (1984) investigated the special effects of weak forms in learner's comprehension of spoken texts. He administrated two dictations; the first, a text was pronounced with full forms and the second with reduced ones. The results proved that presence/absence of weak forms affected the learner's listening comprehension.

Considering the feasibility of this framework (Henrichson 1984) and its appropriateness in analysis, the researcher has used it to carry out his research.

Data analysis

The six selected students were asked to answer the questions to know whether they have the knowledge of using strong and weak forms in English or not. The questionnaire contains ten elements, each of which targets at certain specific goal.

The questionnaire is divided into two sections. The 1st section consists of two open ended questions. The basic purpose of this section is to check out some basic concepts of the students about the function of strong and weak forms. In this section the students are allowed to answer in any language they use.

The 2nd section contains eight multiple choice questions that are aimed at knowing about the students' knowledge of the rules of using strong and weak forms in connected speech. Multiple choice questions are helpful in marking the students' abilities easily as the answers are predetermined.

A listening test is also conducted to analyze the students' ability of listening comprehension and to investigate the problems that cause difficulties in listening comprehension. The listening test consists of an audio recording of five minutes which includes weak forms. Students are directed to point out weak forms in that connected speech.

Analysis of the Questionnaire

Section One

In question number one, the students are directed to give the answer of the importance of strong and weak forms with suitable examples. The main purpose of this question is to know whether the students are aware of the importance of strong and weak forms or not. The question is as follow:

Question 1: What is the importance of learning strong and weak forms are how much necessary in English?

The following table shows the results of students' answers, categorized into groups according to the points on which the students concentrated.

Table's Description:

Question: Question asked.

Answer: Students' Answers to this question

Number: Number of students

Percentage: Percentage of the Students' answers

Question No.1	Answer	Number	Percentage
What is the importance of learning strong and weak forms are how much necessary in English?	Learning strong and weak forms are very much necessary in order to comprehend native' speech.	2	33.3%
	Weak forms are used mostly in informal speech so it is necessary to learn them.	1	16.7%
	Strong and weak forms are necessary part of learning English as foreign language because native speakers' of English use them frequently and in order to comprehend their speech learning the concept of strong and weak forms is necessary.	1	16.7%

	Because they are related to speech so they are necessary to be learnt.	2	33.3%
	Total	6	100%

Table No.1 Concepts of Strong and Weak Forms

The results of this question show that students are aware of the importance of strong and weak forms. It can also be noticed that almost each student has stressed the concept of strong and weak forms. This shows that the students do have awareness about the importance of learning strong and weak forms.

Question 2: In your opinion, why students cannot comprehend native speakers' speech proficiently?

The most expected answer to this question is, because native speakers use weak forms in their connected speech. Our basic purpose is to know that whether the students are aware of the importance of weak forms in listening comprehension. The table shows the results.

Table's Description:

Question: Question asked.

Answer: Students' Answers to this question

Number: Number of students

Percentage: Percentage of the Students' answers

Question	Answers	Number	Percentage
In your opinion, why students cannot comprehend native speakers' speech proficiently?	Because native speakers of English use weak forms to make their speech fluent.	2	33.3%
	Because strong and weak forms are very frequently used in fluent speech.	1	16.7%
	Because they speak fluently.	1	16.7%
	Other	2	33.3%
	Total	6	100%

Table No.2 Students' Answers

The above obtained answers show that the students are aware of the importance of the use of weak forms in English pronunciation. Almost all the students demonstrated clearly the concept of use of weak forms in pronunciation. The answers of the two students (33.3%) were unclear.

Section Two

This section contains eight Multiple Choice questions. More general questions are asked first and then more specific one. Each question has been analyzed separately.

Q.1 The use of weak pronunciation of grammatical words is found in:

- a. Informal speech b. Semi-formal speech
c. Formal speech d. In all of them

This question was asked to know about students' perception of weak forms in native speech. It is clear from their results that;

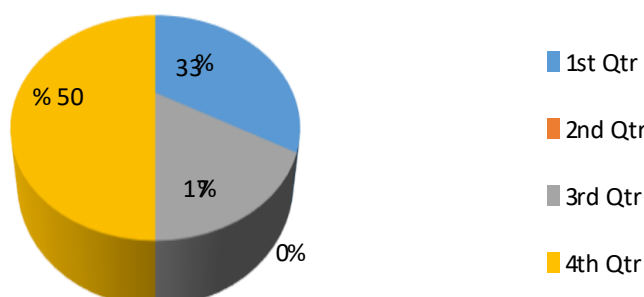
Answers	a	b	c	d	No Answer
Number	2	-	1	3	-
Percentage	33.3%	0%	16.7%	50%	-

Table 3: Students' Answers to Question 3

50% students think that the use of weak forms is not the part of formal speech. 33.3% students believe that weak forms are used only in informal speech whereas 16.7% believe that weak forms are used in formal speech.

Figure 1:

Students' Answers (Question



Question 4: Which form is more regularly used in natural speech than the other?

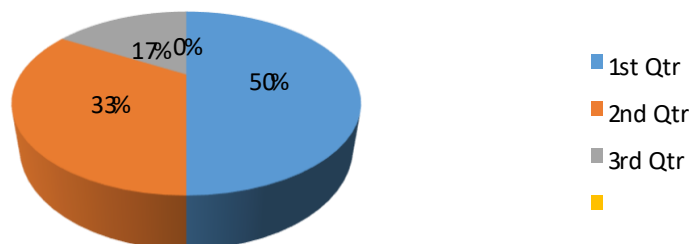
a. The weak form b. The strong form c. They both have the equal frequency
Question number four is concerned with a general ideal about strong and weak forms. Weak forms are normally used in functional words. They are more frequent than strong forms.

Answers	a	b	c	-
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Number	3	2	1	-
Percentage	50%	33.3%	16.7%	-

Table 4: Students' Answers to Question 4

The results in the table above show that fifty percent (50%) students are successful in choosing the correct option is **a**. The weak form. The use of strong form is not very much frequent in normal speech so both the options 'a' and 'c' are false.

Figure 2: Students' Answers (Question 4)

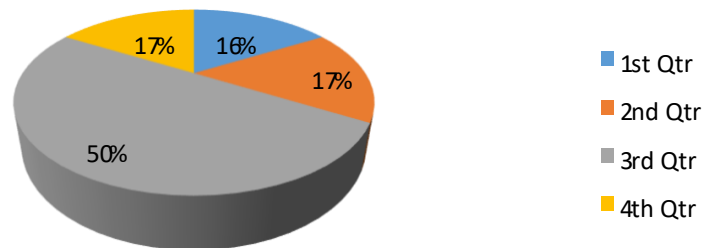
Question 5: The weak form of a grammatical word is used when:

- The functional word is quoted
- The functional word is used in separation
- In both 'a' and 'b' situations
- None of them

Answer	a	b	c	d
Number	1	1	3	1
Percentage	16.7%	16.7%	50%	16.7%

Table 5: Students' Answers to Question 5

Both option 'a' and 'b' are incorrect because these are the instances where strong forms of the functional words are used. Option 'c' is also incorrect. Consequently, it is obvious that option 'd' is correct. It shows that only one student has found the correct answer which is option 'd'. This may be due to option 'a' and 'b' because these are the instances which determine whether strong form should be used or not.

Figure 3: Students' Answers (Question a5)**Question 6: Functional words are usually pronounced strongly if:**

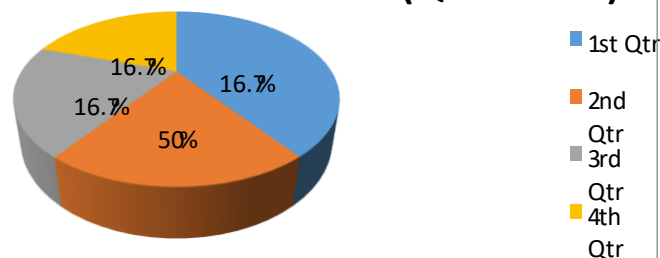
- a. They receive no sentence stress
- b. They occur at final position within the sentence
- c. In both 'a' and 'b' situations
- d. None of them

This question deals with sentences, in which functional words have to be stressed. In this case, the students' declarative knowledge regarding the rules of deletion is sought. That is, the students will choose correct answer if they will be aware of the rule that governs it.

Answer	A	b	c	d
Number	1	3	1	1
Percentage	16.7%	50%	16.7%	16.7%

Table 6: Students' Answers to Question 6

The results of the students' answers show that 50% students' answers are correct. Other students' answers are wrong simply because they might not know the rule.

Figure 4: Students' Answers (Question 6)

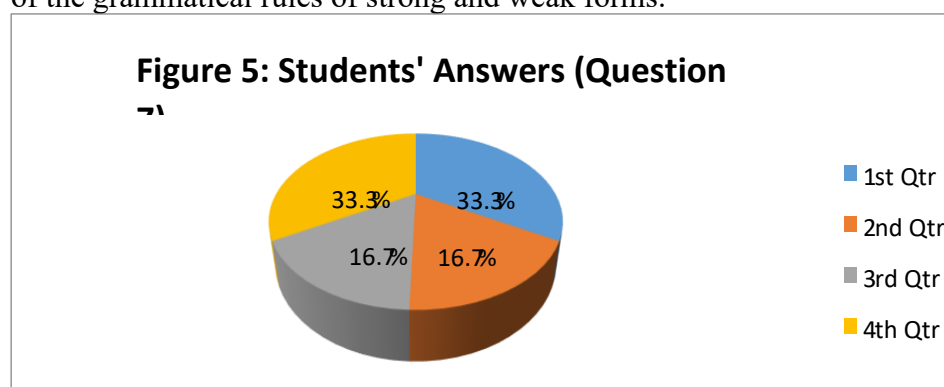
Question 7: The word ‘that’ is pronounced weakly in the situation:

- a. When used in a relative clause. b. When used as a demonstrative.
c. In both ‘a’ and ‘b’ situations. d. None of them.

Answer	a	B	c	D
Number	2	1	1	2
Percentage	33.3%	16.7%	16.7%	33.3%

Table 7: Students’ Answers to Question 7

In this question, the students’ awareness of the rules regarding the use of weak forms is sought. For example, the word ‘that’, it is regularly stressed depending on the category of the word whether it should be stressed or not. The correct answer is option ‘a’. Only two students’ answer is correct. Most of the students’ answers are false. This may be because of the unawareness of the grammatical rules of strong and weak forms.



Question 8: The words ‘are’ and ‘her’ both have a common weak form which is:

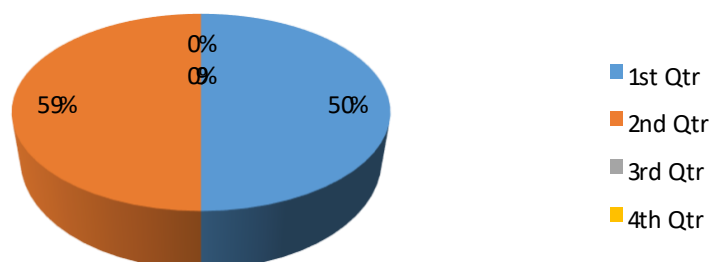
- a. /r/ b. /ə/ c. /eə/ ds. /e/

This question requires from the students, not only the awareness about the use of weak forms but also awareness about the phonemic symbols that are used in transcription.

Answer	a	b	c	d
Number	3	3	-	-
Percentage	50%	50%	0%	0%

Table 8: Students’ Answers to Question 8

Option ‘b’ is the correct answer. The results show that 50% students have given the correct answer. Remaining 50% students have given the wrong answer. This means that students are partly aware of the reduction rules for the two given words. We can obviously observe that this is the only question in which the ratio of correct answers and wrong answers is equal.

Table 6: Students' Answers to Question 8

Question 9: In the following functional words which word is regularly stressed (does not have a weak form)?

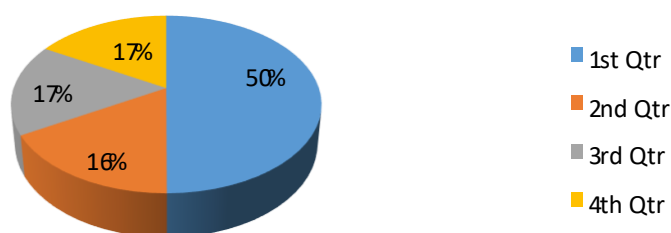
- a. any b. where c. for d. because

The functional word 'where' is regularly stressed. The regular stressed words are not listed in teaching weak and strong forms. So it is obvious that if students do not have the basic awareness about strong and weak forms, they will most likely rely on other words they are aware of. In the following table their answers are listed.

Answer	a	b	c	d
Number	3	1	1	1
Percentage	50%	16.7%	16.7%	16.7%

Table 9: Students Answers to Question 9

It can be observed that only 1 student (16.7%) out of 6 (100%) selected the correct option. Most of the students selected wrong option which shows that the lack the necessary information about the use of strong and weak forms of the functional words.

Figure 7: Students' Answers (Question 9)

Question 10: The word 'was' is pronounced weakly in the sentence:

- a. You have written was instead of 'were'.
b. She said that her car was broken down.

- c. I think he was.
d. A: I didn't see you in the get-together.

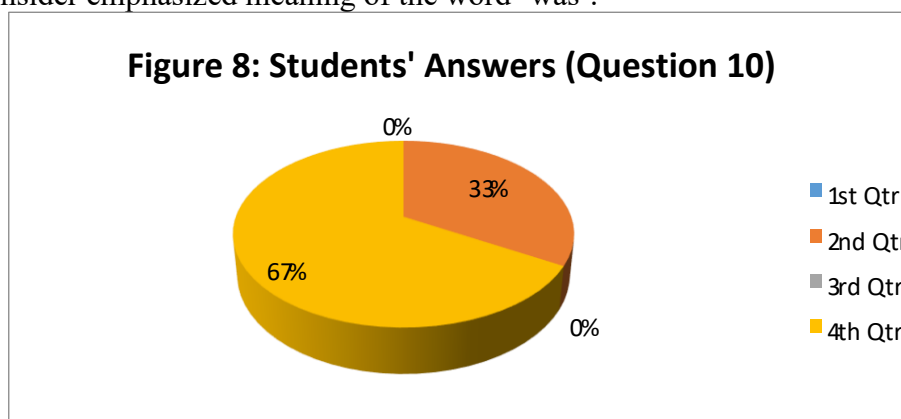
B. I was there.

In this question the students are simply asked to choose the correct option, using their background knowledge about the rules of usage of strong and weak forms. They are required to identify the rule, whether the word 'was' being stressed or not and also to identify its position in the sentence.

Answer	A	b	c	D
Number	-	2	-	4
Percentage	0%	33.3%	0%	66.7%

Table10: Students' Answers to Question 10

The results of this question demonstrate that most of the students are unaware of the rules of using weak forms or they just simply do not know the application of them. Option 'b' is the correct option. Only two students out of six have been answered correctly. Almost 70% students have selected option 'd' which is the wrong answer, it might be because they did not consider emphasized meaning of the word 'was'.

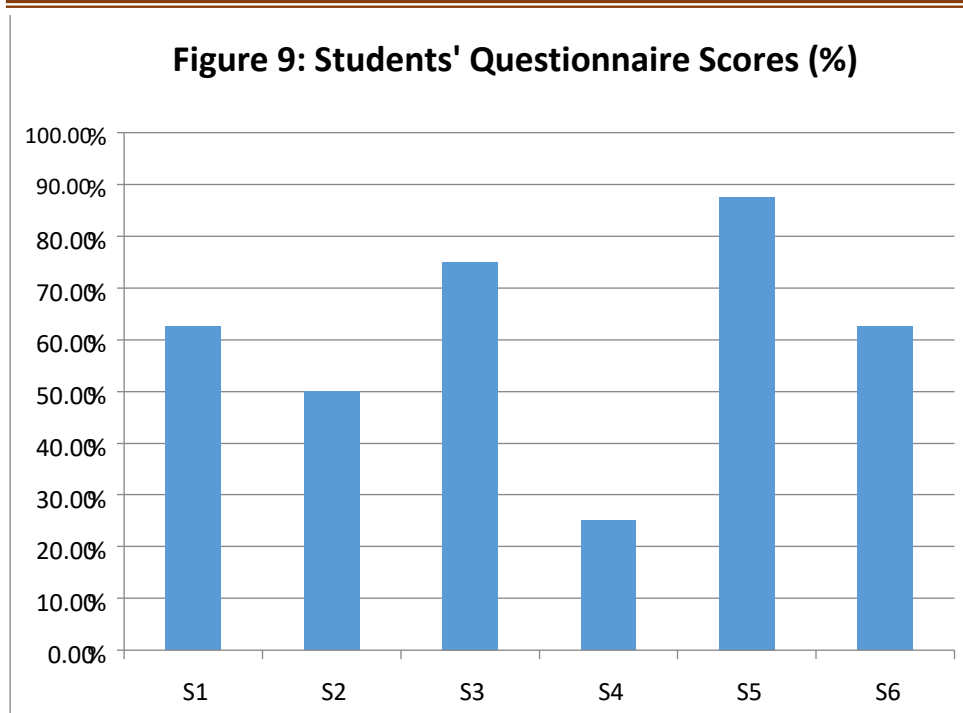


Students' Final Questionnaire Score

After analyzing the questionnaire, the researcher can calculate the total score of each student. The scores are as follow:

Student	Score/16	Percentage
S1	10	62.5%
S2	08	50%
S3	12	75%
S4	04	25%
S5	14	87.5%
S6	10	62.5%

Table 11: Students' Total Questionnaire Scores



Analysis of the Listening Test

Description and procedure

A listening test is also conducted to investigate the ability of listening comprehension. It has been observed that students do have problems while listening to native speakers of English because they frequently use weak forms in order to make their speech fluent. The selected participants of this research are asked to listen an audio recording of thirty seconds (30 seconds) which contained weak forms. Each sentence consists of at least one functional word pronounced in its weak form.

The students are given a transcript of the recorded sentences with missing functional words. The job of the students is to identify the weak form of the functional word in the sentence and fill the given blank space with full form of that functional word. The results have showed the ability of the students whether they are able to identify the native speakers' speech or not. Buck says, "the ability to replace the blanks [in a cloze test] would be directly related to the degree of successful language processing" (2001: 69).

The participants are given three instructions. First, if a student recognizes a word, he/she will write the full form of word in the blank space. Second, if a student fails to recognize the spoken word, he/she will encircle the blank space. Third, if the student thinks that the blank space does not correspond to any of the spoken word, he/she will cross the blank space.

Word Class	Functional Word	Number of occurrences
Prepositions	From	3
	To	1
	For	4
	At	2
Articles	The	3
	A	1
Auxiliary Verbs	Been	1
	Was	2
	Were	1
	Must	1
	Shall	3
	Are	2
Total		24

Table 12: The Functional Words in the Test**Analysis of the Test**

The result of this listening test is based on the correct and incorrect answers of the research participants. First, the researcher has calculated the correct and incorrect answers and then the researcher has summed up the results as final scores ($x/24$). The table below shows the results of the test.

Students	Recognized items		Unrecognized items		Crossed blanks	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
S1	4	25%	12	75%	-	-
S2	3	18.75%	12	75%	1	6.25%
S3	1	6.25%	13	81.75%	2	18.75%
S4	3	18.75%	13	81.75%	-	-
S5	6	37.5%	10	62.5%	-	-
S6	5	31.255%	11	68.75	-	-

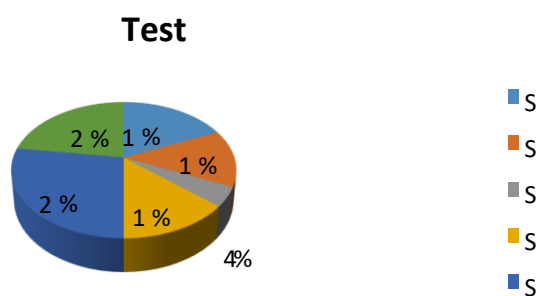
Table 13: Students' Raw Answers in the Cloze Test

The results, in the table given above shows each student's personal evaluation of his/her ability. Most of the students' result demonstrates that they cannot recognize the weak forms of the functional words. The number of recognized items is 6 out of 16 items. It means almost 37.5% words are

recognized by the students. The number of unrecognized items or wrongly marked items is 10. We can observe that most of the grammatical words have been very difficult to be recognized by the students.

The most problematic words to be recognized by the students are 'her, there, must, for and from'. The reason for this may be because of the use of schwa sound /ə/. Schwa (ə) sound is the most recurring sound in connected fluent speech and thus, is the most difficult sound to be recognized. The result of this analysis shows that students have many problems in recognizing most of the grammatical words in connected speech of the native speakers of English.

Figure 9: Students' Final Scores in Listening



Summary and Discussion

It can be demonstrated based on this analysis that 3rd semester students do have difficulties in listening comprehension because native speakers of English use weak forms of the functional words to make their speech fluent. As for as students' competence is concerned, students' lack in listening comprehension may be because they are not taught properly about the usage of weak forms in connected speech or may be because they have not paid much attention to the learning of strong and weak forms of the functional words. The definitions given by the students reveal that they have much knowledge about strong and weak forms, but the results of the multiple-choice section show that instead of having much knowledge about strong and weak forms, they still lack in using, comprehending and recognizing weak forms in connected fluent speech.

Conclusion

In this research article, the researcher has addressed the issue of listening comprehension faced by 3rd semester students of master's level from Graduate Studies Department (GS) at National University of Modern Languages. The researcher has also highlighted the reason for this lack in listening comprehension.

Listening is the only skill among four language skills e.g speaking, writing and reading which has been paid very less attention, both on the part of teachers and students. This may be because students' performance is always judged on these three language skills, ignoring the listening skill. Ultimately

this ignorance of listening skill leads foreign language learners to face many difficulties in listening comprehension while having a conversation with a native speaker or listening to other genres of spoken English e.g news, movies etc. The results of this research show that students of foreign language learning do face difficulties in listening comprehension. This is mostly because the use of weak forms in spoken language is not taught properly by the teachers and also the students have not paid much attention to listening skill.

Recommendations

In the light of the findings of this research study, it is concluded that students of foreign language should not be taught only about the definition and declarative knowledge about the use of strong and weak forms. But also, the learners of foreign language must be given practice using strong and weak forms. This will help students in listening comprehension as well as in using strong and weak forms in their speech in real life. The teaching of strong and weak forms should not only be taught in phonetics but there should also be other instances for practicing functional words using weak forms. So, in a nutshell it has been proposed through this research that extensive practice with weak forms is much necessary.

Aspects for Further Research

Other researchers can research to find out other variables that should be included in order to extend the subject's scope. Other researchers can deal with other aspects such as assimilation, elision etc as aspects of this subject.

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Appendix-A

QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire serves as a data collection tool for a research project. You are kindly requested to answer this questionnaire by which we aim at checking some information about the use of strong and weak forms of functional words in English. We will be so grateful if you take the time and energy to answer it. The information gathered by this questionnaire will be strictly confidential. If you have any question, do not hesitate to ask. For section one, feel free to answer in any language that you want.

Name:

(Optional) Class:

.....

Section:

Date:

University:

.....

.....

.....

Section One

1. Using examples, give a brief definition of the concept of strong and weak forms in English.

.....

.....

.....

2. In your opinion, and on the basis of what you have learnt, what is the importance of learning about strong and weak forms in English?

.....

.....

.....

Section Two

For each of the following questions, circle the letter of the right answer.

Choose only one answer out of the options provided.

1. The weak pronunciation of functional words is used in:

- a) Informal speech.
- b) Semi-formal speech.
- c) Formal speech.
- d) All of them.

2. In natural speech, which form is more frequent than the other?

- a) The weak form.
- b) The strong form.
- c) They have the same frequency.

3. The weak form of a functional word is usually used when:

- a) The functional word is quoted.

- b) The functional word is used in isolation.
- c) In both “a” and “b” situations.
- 4. In which of the following examples is the word “was” pronounced weakly?
 - a) I think he was.
 - b) She said that her car was broken down.
 - c) You have written “was” instead of “were”.
- 5. Functional words are usually pronounced strongly if:
 - a) They do not receive sentence stress.
 - b) They occur in sentence final position.
 - c) If the preceding word is stressed.
 - d) None of them.
- 6. In which situation is the word “that” pronounced weakly?
 - a) When it is used in a relative clause.
 - b) When it is used as a demonstrative.
 - c) In both “a” and “b” situations.
 - d) In none of them.
- 7. The words “her” and have a common weak form which is:
 - a) / r /
 - b) /a: /
 - c) /e /
 - d) /ə /
- 8. Which one of the following functional words is regularly stressed (does not have a weak form)?
 - a) Because
 - b) Were
 - c) For
 - d) Any

Appendix-B

Section Three

This is a transcript of 20 sentences that you are going to listen to. As you notice, some words are blanked out. You are required to fill in the blanks based on what you listen to. If you think that a given blank does not correspond to any word in the recording, put a cross on that blank. For instance, if you hear "how are you" and you find in the paper "how.... are you", put a cross in the space provided. If you hear a word but you cannot recognize it, put a circle in the space.

A

1. book notes.
2. Aren't letters open

B

1. soup fridge.
2. I great.
3. Jane.

C

1. I stay.
2. I money.
3. second hand.
4. Weroom.

D

1. Ibest try later.
2. The engaged over an hour.
3.lot not justtwo.

E

1. come over dinner soon.
2. I five o'clock.
3. When taking
4. here.

F

1. new books read.
2. He wants to come home.
3.take want.
4. Why am I too latetoday?