

A Preliminary Analysis of Factors Influencing Paragraph Dictation

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Abstract: This study begins with a preliminary analysis of the factors influencing the paragraph dictation, component of the Test for English Majors Band 4 (TEM4). The factors include vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, phonetic comprehension ability, cultural background knowledge, and short-term memory capacity. By making analysis on these linguistic knowledge and non-linguistic knowledge factors, the study proposes corresponding strategies to enhance dictation skills, aiming to assist teachers and students in adopting effective training methods, and to boost learning interest and confidence.

Keywords: Factors; Methods; Paragraph Dictation; TEM4.

1. Introduction

The TEM4 (Test for English Majors Band4) dictation segment employs a paragraph dictation format, integrating dictation into a comprehensive language skill assessment. The dictation content covers a wide range of topics, requiring candidates to accurately record every word and punctuation mark while listening and dictating simultaneously. This section combines abilities such as auditory discrimination, information comprehension, memory, and writing skills for evaluation. English majors are challenged to accurately transcribe all words within a set time frame, making it a significant hurdle. Consequently, the average scores for the dictation section in the TEM4 are generally low. Additionally, considering the structure of the TEM4, the dictation section is positioned at the beginning of the test. Therefore, performance in this segment can influence a candidate's overall emotional state during the examination, subsequently affecting the final results.

2. Factors Hindering Students' Performance in Paragraph Dictation

Based on extensive practical experience, several factors have been identified that hinder students' performance in the TEM4 listening and dictation section. This paper begins with a preliminary analysis of these influencing factors and then focuses on proposing feasible strategies to address them. The aim is to provide insights for future teaching and learning of the TEM4 listening and dictation section, thereby assisting in enhancing students' dictation skills.

2.1. Linguistic Knowledge Factors

Linguistic knowledge encompasses several aspects, including vocabulary, grammatical understanding, and phonetic comprehension abilities [1]. Firstly, a limited vocabulary directly affects the accuracy of dictation, leading to students' inability to quickly respond and correctly spell words when heard[2]. This necessitates that teachers emphasize vocabulary accumulation in their teaching and employ various methods to help students enhance their vocabulary. Secondly, grammar knowledge deficit. Insufficient knowledge of grammar hinders students from

correctly understanding and applying sentence structures during dictation, impacting the overall dictation performance. Teachers should strengthen grammar instruction to enable students to flexibly apply grammatical rules and improve their dictation skills. Thirdly, a lack of phonetic comprehension ability makes it difficult for students to accurately distinguish between similarly pronounced words, affecting the accuracy of dictation. Teachers should enhance listening training and imitation exercises to improve students' phonetic discrimination and pronunciation accuracy [3].

2.2. Non-Linguistic Knowledge Factors

Firstly, a deficiency in cultural background knowledge can affect students' understanding of dictation content, especially when it involves specific cultural contexts or idioms. Familiarity with cultural backgrounds enhances accuracy in English dictation tasks. Understanding the cultural context related to the English language is crucial for effective learning. During listening exercises, it becomes evident that students who are unfamiliar with the relevant cultural references perform poorly in dictation tasks. Secondly, memory capacity, particularly short-term memory and note-taking skills, greatly influences performance in English dictation. Many students report that while they can understand the listening material, their lack of memorization techniques results in slow cognitive processing, making it difficult to recall lengthy sentences accurately. Lastly, psychological factors play a vital role in dictation tasks. Confidence levels vary based on topic familiarity; students tend to perform better when they encounter topics they know well. Conversely, unfamiliar topics or unexpected vocabulary and cultural references can induce anxiety, leading to a mental block and an inability to focus, thus preventing them from comprehending and transcribing what they should have been able to capture.

3. Strategies and Suggestions

3.1. Strengthening Vocabulary

English majors are required not only to invest considerable time and effort in English vocabulary acquisition through extensive reading and listening but also to pay close attention to the correct spelling and proficiency of English words. Effective vocabulary memorization should avoid rote

learning; instead, it should leverage factors such as spelling patterns of English words and the connection between spelling and pronunciation for rapid and accurate memory retention. For vocabulary stipulated in the teaching syllabus, students must not only recognize these words but also be able to spell them quickly and accurately, avoiding careless habits. In daily teaching, instructors should consciously encourage students to develop good habits in writing English words and using punctuation correctly, to prevent the regret of understanding the content but failing to score due to incorrect spelling.

3.2. Consolidating Grammar Foundation

For English majors, a solid foundation in grammar is indispensable. Only by consolidating their grasp of English grammar and understanding its intrinsic rules can they comprehend the meaning of English texts and perform well in passage listening and writing. The two minutes allocated after the listening and writing test for review are extremely precious. Candidates with a strong grasp of grammar can fully utilize their knowledge to analyze the passage they have written and quickly identify grammatical errors for correction; those with a weaker grammar foundation may find themselves at a loss during this time, wasting valuable opportunities. Therefore, cultivating an awareness of grammar and improving grammatical skills through regular training is crucial for enhancing exam performance. It is recommended that English majors regularly review common grammatical knowledge, identify weaknesses, and undertake targeted exercises for reinforcement. Furthermore, instructors should emphasize the importance of grammar through explanations of typical errors after each dictation practice, enhancing training on difficult grammatical points to improve overall grammatical awareness and proficiency.

3.3. Enhancing Phonetic Training

Improving listening skills requires familiarity with English pronunciation patterns and intonation. Undoubtedly, students with poor phonetic foundations and inaccurate pronunciation will struggle with listening comprehension. Their lack of standard pronunciation and intonation makes it difficult to accurately capture the correct words or sentences, affecting overall listening ability, especially evident in listening and writing tests. Unlike listening comprehension, listening and writing tests require candidates to write down the material word for word based on comprehensive understanding, presenting significant challenges. Thus, English majors should consciously focus on phonetic and intonational training in regular practice. Through extensive listening and imitation, from phonemes to words, phrases, and sentences, they should cultivate a sense of English and enhance their abilities to listen and distinguish sounds, continuously accumulating knowledge on English pronunciation. Through repeated practice and insight, mastering the rules of English pronunciation will support success in TEM4 paragraph dictation.

3.4. Accumulating Knowledge of English Cultural Background

If good listening comprehension is a necessary condition for correctly understanding listening materials, then a rich background in cultural knowledge can enable learners and examinee to achieve more with less effort in listening practice or exams. Language and culture are inseparable. Difficulties

in memory and understanding make it impossible to write down the entire text word for word accurately. Conversely, if the material is familiar to the examinee, their brain's reservoir of related knowledge helps them understand and remember the received language information more smoothly.

3.5. Enhancing Confidence and Improving Psychological Quality

Years of experience in teaching English listening to majors have shown that students' dictation comprehension ability is influenced more by non-intellectual factors than language skills. High anxiety among students is a significant factor leading to failure in acquiring listening information and scoring low in dictation. If students lack confidence in their learning, they may exhibit listening anxiety during training, which becomes particularly evident in exams, affecting their understanding of the material and the quality of their dictation. Overcoming listening test anxiety and effectively boosting psychological resilience play a crucial role in the overall exam performance. To reduce exam anxiety, efforts should start with regular training aimed at boosting students' confidence. Exam anxiety mainly stems from past failed learning experiences and long-term lack of confidence, which inevitably leads to difficulty, resistance, and aversion, causing natural nervousness and anxiety during exams. Teachers can try to give more positive feedback in class to boost students' confidence. Additionally, creating a relaxed atmosphere with music during exams can also be helpful. If students' confidence is enhanced, they will focus their attention on the content of the dictation passage under a confident mental state. "Attention" is a crucial factor in organizing and maintaining all psychological activities of students; highly focused thought helps students forget anxiety, preventing excessive nervousness.

3.6. Enhancing Memory Techniques Training

Students should fully utilize the dictation format in TEM4, employing corresponding memory, writing techniques, and strategies. During the dictation process, it is crucial to distinguish between primary and secondary information, focusing on sentence structures and key words. On the first listening pass, emphasize understanding the general idea of the text and key terms; avoid starting to write immediately upon hearing the recording [4]. Otherwise, one might manage to write down some initial words or sentences but could lose sight of the overall context, making accurate transcription challenging. The second and third passes are paused at sense units. In the second listening, due to time constraints, it is impossible to write down every word verbatim; thus, learning to use abbreviations and symbols is essential. For example, certain letter combinations or symbols can represent specific words. Of course, students must be very familiar with these abbreviations and symbols, meaning they should frequently practice this method during regular dictation exercises. This way, they can adeptly and naturally apply these methods during the exam without becoming flustered or using unfamiliar symbols that they themselves do not recognize. On the third pass, fill in other secondary information such as modifiers and definite articles that were omitted. In the final pass (fourth), carefully review and correct any omissions.

4. Conclusion

The paragraph dictation section of TEM4 for English

major is a comprehensive linguistic assessment that integrates both linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge. In routine dictation teaching activities, teachers should not only help students enhance their vocabulary, grammar, and phonetic knowledge but also encourage them to accumulate cultural background knowledge related to English and train their memory techniques and psychological resilience. Only by doing so can we fundamentally improve students' abilities in the TEM4 dictation section.

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