

PAUSE PATTERN UTILISATION DURING SPOKEN INTERACTION AND COMMUNICATIVE EFFECTIVENESS: A CASE OF ENGLISH AS L2 USERS IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Prosody is a little-investigated aspect of speech, concerning not what one says but the way one says it. In this study, pause pattern – which is one of the prosody elements – was being investigated in relation to its utilisation during spoken interaction and communicative effectiveness among users of English as a second language in Malaysia. This study aimed to examine– (i) the relation between pause pattern utilisation and communicative effectiveness by measuring results of tests data difference; (ii) the degree of association between pause pattern utilisation and communicative effectiveness. 106 respondents were involved in this study. A Pre- and Post-test design was used, and analysis was conducted using paired sample t-test in testing the hypotheses formed. Then, a set of questionnaire was distributed to respondents in the experimental group which was subsequently analysed using Chi Square Test. Conclusively; it was found that pause pattern facilitated comprehension in communication among second language users in Malaysia. The degree of association between pause pattern and communicative effectiveness is found to be high at $C=0.889$.

Keywords: *pause pattern, spoken interaction, communicative effectiveness, second language users*

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INTRODUCTION

Keeping abreast with the fast-growing trend of globalisation, Malaysia is currently experiencing a more rapid growth from day to day. For this purpose, Malaysia requires an increasing demand for expertise in various fields. As a result of this situation, Malaysian students and graduates should be well-equipped with solid education foundation and in training to remain competitive; including the ability to communicate well in English. In Malaysia, English has been integrated in the education system since pre-independence era. It has been used as medium of interaction then and been interchangeably used with Bahasa Melayu. As the world develops, English plays a major role as the language of international communication. According to Khairi Izwan, A. & Nurul Lina, A.R. (2010), graduates who have better command of English will most likely to possess greater chances and opportunities to be hired by multinational companies after they have completed their studies. It is very essential for Malaysian students who are the second language users to acquire communicative effectiveness in English so that they can use the language efficiently in academic as well as in professional setting.

In an article published by The Star Online (2007), the writer reported that one-third of students who graduated from public universities in the previous years have very low English language proficiency. This is further validated by Dato' Seri Mohamed Khalid Nordin, the former Minister of Malaysia Higher Education who mentioned in The National Graduate Employability Blueprint (2012), "Prospective employers complain of fresh Institution of Higher Learning (IHL) graduates lacking the prerequisite attributes; more than 50% of fresh graduates are deemed to be unsatisfactory in English communication skills, and yet, many of these young, inexperienced job-seekers expect unrealistically high starting salaries". Having poor command in English, the candidates have already fallen into second-class candidates category, even though they obtained good academic grades. In the blueprint, it is evident that having good technical skill is highly favourable; but having an excellent communication skill would definitely be an X-factor determining the candidates' employability in the working sector.

The lack of a good command of English is one of the major factors that prevent students from getting employment in the job sector (Gopala K. S. N., Roszainora S., Nor Zaitolakma A. S., Nazrul Nadziruddin M. Z., Azyanee L., Thenmolli V. & Haslina C. N., 2014). In the study conducted, Gopala et. al. (2014) mentioned that there are still signs that students are reluctant to use English language to communicate with each other despite language educators' efforts in applying the language in the classroom. English mastery is an essential element as revealed in The National Graduate Employability Blueprint (2012). This is important because English is the international language for communication which is needed in order for students to succeed in the working world.

Every language in this world is divided into four main skills namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. As research demonstrated that adults spend 40-50% amount of communication in listening, 25-30% in speaking, 11-16% in reading, and only about 9% in writing (Mumtaz, A., Humaira, Y., Maimoona, Y., 2015), it is important for language users to be competent at listening and speaking skill for communication to be effective. Communicating effectively means that the speaker uses verbal speech or other methods of

relaying information that get a point across, or in other words, be understood by the listener. One of the many problems faced by speakers is when the message sent is not comprehended as expected. As mentioned by Lumsden, G. & Lumsden, D. (2003), sending a message only means it was transmitted; it ensures nothing about what happens after that. This means that the speaker has already performed his or her role in conveying the message to the interlocutor; nonetheless, this does not mean that the listener understands the message as being perceived, understood and sent by the speaker.

Cole, J., Mo, Y., & Baek, S. (2010) stated that as the linguistic structure of spoken languages, prosody serves as an important function in speech communication. In relation to this study, pause pattern is being investigated. Cole, et. al. (2010) further mentioned that ... from a listener's standpoint; one must attend to this phonetic variation ... in order to reconstruct the prosody context and to understand the meaning of an utterance as intended by the speaker. This view is supported by Gilbert, J. B. (2008) who stated that language students claimed that "native speakers talk too fast". Inability to identify the prosody properties and its utilisations means that they could not 'follow' the flow of speech as produced by the speaker as they are struggling to understand the message conveyed by the speaker and keeping up with the on-going interaction. The listeners are facing difficult time in the process of decoding the intended message as well as trying to understand the purpose of the conversation. As a result, this leads to reluctance of second language users of English to utilise the language as medium of interaction in everyday life.

Gilbert (2008) further extended that communication in spoken English is organised by "musical signals". These signals serve as the "road signs" to help the listener follow the intentions of the speaker. Therefore, this study intends to investigate the effect of prosody, namely the pause pattern in spoken interaction towards communicative effectiveness among second language users in Malaysia with the research questions outlined as follows;

1. What is the relation between pause pattern utilisation and communicative effectiveness among second language users?
2. How strong is the degree of relation between pause utilisation and communicative effectiveness among second language users?

In the subsequent sections of this paper, discussion on previous studies related to this topic is be done in Literature Review section; followed by explanation of the research design, population sample and data collecting instruments and analysis in the Research Method section. Next, Data Finding and Discussion section elaborates on the results of experiments conducted, before and after the treatment; as well as questionnaire analysis. Finally, Conclusion and Recommendation section concludes the paper with summary based on findings in this study and the suggestions for future studies in relation to this topic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communicating effectively means that the speaker uses verbal speech or other methods of relaying information that get a point across, or in other words, be understood by the listener. An example of effective communication is when a speaker talks in clear and simple terms. In a study conducted by Cole et. al. (2010), it was found that transfer of

information between speaker and listener is the main goal of speech communication. Since the speaker sends messages which need to be decoded by the listener, it is important for the latter to infer or intelligently guess the message conveyed by the speaker. In relation to the purpose of facilitating communication among second language users of English, this research studies the relation of prosody features used during spoken interaction and communicative effectiveness as the message is being perceived by the listeners.

According to Seppanen, T., Vayrynen, E. & Toivanen, J. (2003), prosody is a variation which exists when speaking. The variation is utilised easily by speakers of all languages in the world. Generally, it can be assumed that all languages in the world have their own prosody properties which are unique and identifiable to the native language users. For these properties to be well-accepted by the native users, they should be utilised and accepted by a community of people and the same understanding should occur to the language users. A study by Teilanyo, D. I. (2010) found that prosody features, which are paralinguistic elements, are used in order to aid communication. This is similar to the finding made by Gilbert (2008) who stated that prosody assisted communication among its learners by providing “road signs” as signal to follow the speaker’s intention. In this study, one of the prosody properties, which is the pause pattern is studied in order to investigate the effect of its utilisation among second language users of English in Malaysia towards communicative effectiveness.

Malaysia is a growing country which needs manpower who are experts in their respective fields as well as having the ability to converse fluently in English. In the 2015 MUET report published by Malaysia Examination Council (MPM), the results for listening and speaking test shown a declining trend. In the examination session, most of the candidates scored the lower bands, namely Bands 1 and 2 which identifies them as ‘Extremely Limited User’ and ‘Limited User’ respectively. This shows that the language competency of students in Malaysia is becoming an alarming matter (<http://portal.mpm.edu.my>, 2016). Most students in Malaysia avoid speaking in English despite the efforts done by the language educators to help mastery of the language. Their reluctance due to difficulties in communicating is caused by the failure to understand the speaker’s meaning which leads to failure to respond during the interaction and eventually leads to failure in communication.

Considering that most English as Second Language (ESL) teachers themselves are not native speakers of English (Mohd. Faisal, H., 2012), the exposure that students get may not help them to master the language. Issues such as non-native pronunciation and unfamiliarity to prosody properties utilisation in communication may hinder development of the language mastery among students. The tendencies of code-switching in classrooms may also be high which may result in unfavourable classroom environment for students to learn the language. Realising the severity of the issue and its harm towards Malaysian education scenario, preventive measures should be taken to ensure students’ motivation in learning, understanding and finally utilising English as a second language. Looking at the issues related to English language use, this study intends to find facilitative measures through prosody property (namely the pause pattern) utilisation that can help Malaysian students whom are the second language learner to master English better and eventually be proficient in the language.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, quasi-experimental research design was adopted and utilised in order to suit the availability of sample and time factor in conducting the study. The outline of the research is according to quasi-experimental design as suggested by White, R. T., & Arzi, H. J. (2005). In this research, the method used involved measuring the tests performances between control and experimental group. The 'Pre-test – Post-test Non-equivalent Group Design' is illustrated in the following diagram:

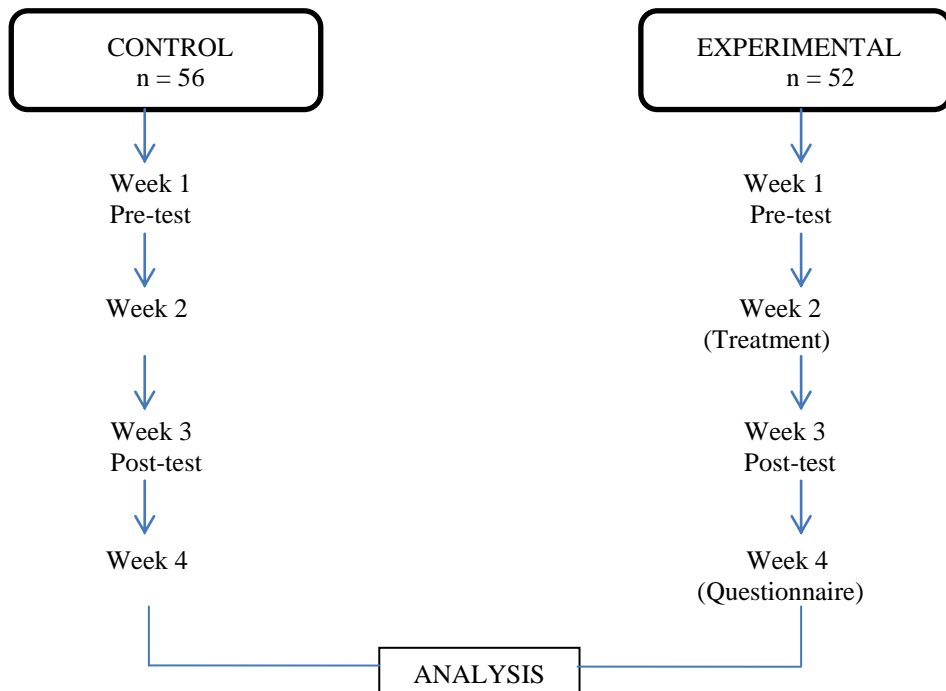
Fig. 1: 'Pre-test – Post-test Non-equivalent Group Design' diagram

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{NR} \quad 0_1 \quad X \quad 0_2 \\ \text{NR} \quad \hline 0_1 \quad \quad 0_2 \end{array} \quad \text{gain} = 0_2 - 0_1$$

- NR non-random selection of subjects or assignments of group
- X treatment to experimental group
- 0_1 pre-test administration
- 0_2 post-test administration
- a line between levels indicates equated groups

This method enables the researcher to measure effects of the imposed treatments towards participants primarily by comparing test results between different participants. The following shows the outline of the study:

Fig 2: Outline of the Study



For the purpose of this study, 106 respondents who were students studying Diploma in Education (Teaching English as Second Language) in a private higher learning institution, were assigned into different groups without considering their English proficiency. They were also put in the groups due to selection of subjects which were registered in the current semester. There were 56 respondents in the Control Group and 52 respondents in the Experimental Group. The study took four weeks to complete and the administration of experimental and control treatments to both groups respectively were carried out in the weeks following the pre-test administration. The two groups of respondents were assigned to be the experimental and control group respectively. During the first week, both groups listened to Recording 1. The audio consisted of utterances of 12 sentences. The intonation pattern markers of the sentences referred to samples as used by Nolan, F. (2014). The example of intonation patterns is marked as below.

Fig. 3: Pause pattern feature.



“I want to have chocolate, **II** cake **II** and biscuits.”

The respondents were required to identify whether the speaker was asking to have chocolate, cake and biscuits or merely a chocolate-cake and biscuits. In the sample, the sentence was uttered with a pause between chocolate, cake and biscuits. Thus, this shows that the speaker was implying to have three different food items rather than just chocolate-cake and biscuits.

The respondents were briefed on the format of the listening process prior to the listening test session. In the beginning, the respondents were given two minutes to read all the questions in the pre-test paper. This was carried out to ensure that the respondents were ready for the test. After that, the listening test was conducted. The respondents then listened to the audio recording and answered the questions at the same time. Discussion and communication among each other was not allowed during listening to the audio recording as well as during answering the test questions. The reason for this implementation was because the students were asked to solely depend on their listening and comprehension ability; and not other factors outside listening skill.

In the following week, a minor change was applied in the procedural technique in order to repeat the experiment. Before taking post-test, respondents in the experimental group were taught on prosody and pause pattern utilisation. The cues that the feature indicates and signifies were thoroughly discussed. Exercises were also given in helping the respondents to identify and understand the pause pattern utilisation. On the third week, post-test was conducted. For the post-test session, the same procedure as implemented during pre-test in week one was applied. In the fourth week, which was the final week, a set of questionnaire was distributed to the respondents in experimental group.

After the collection of data from both groups, the researcher puts the data in a table where the mean score of each group was obtained. The data was analysed again by using the

statistical significance, which was Paired Sample T-test in order to test the significance of the data collected and at the same time, make the findings reliable and valid (Rouse, M., 2014). In testing the strength or degree of relation between utilisation of pause pattern and communicative effectiveness, Chi Square test was conducted.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The mean scores for all the tests were taken so as to compare the differences between the pre-test and the post-test scores for both control and experimental groups. The difference of mean scores will help in investigating and consecutively answers Research Question 1 in this study. The following table shows the mean scores for both groups.

Fig. 4: Mean scores for Pre and Post-tests of Experimental and Control Group.

Test	Control	Experimental
Pre-test	1.34	1.33
Post-test	1.41	1.70

From the table above, it can be seen that the results of the tests seem to favour the experimental group more than the control group. Looking at the pre-test results, it was obvious that the experimental group had more marks, indicating that they performed better in the tests than the control group. T-test was used in order to test the significance of mean differences between these groups.

To begin, a null hypothesis was formed in order to test the significance for mean scores difference between control and experimental group. The null hypothesis is as follows:

H_0 : There will be no difference in communicative effectiveness due to the utilisation of pause pattern in sentence processing.

For the control group, the null hypothesis was accepted as the p-value falls under the accepted region of the null hypothesis at 5% level of significance (p-value > 0.05). The p-value of t-test obtained was 0.35. The null hypothesis which states that the utilisation of pitch pattern in sentence processing gave no significant difference in communicative effectiveness is accepted. The detail of t-test is shown as in the following table:

Fig. 5: Paired Samples Test Data for Control Group.

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	d. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
MeanControlPretest - MeanControlPosttest	-.06250	.21687	.02898	-.12058	-.00442	-2.157	55	.35

With the null hypothesis and other details similar to the previous test, the value of t-test for the experimental group was obtained, which is 0.0001. In the paired sample t-test with 5% level of significance, the value falls under rejected region, as the p-value is lesser than 0.05; thus making the null hypothesis to be rejected. An alternative hypothesis which is H_1 was formed and accepted. The following is the alternative hypothesis formed:

H_1 : There will be a significant difference in communicative effectiveness due to the utilisation of pause pattern in sentence processing.

The rejection of null hypothesis and acceptance of alternative hypothesis shows that there was a significant difference in communicative effectiveness due to the utilisation of pause pattern in sentence processing. The detail of t-test is shown as in the following table:

Fig. 6: Paired Samples Test Data for Experimental Group

	Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	d. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
MeanExpPretest - MeanExpPosttest	-.36218	.33288	.04616	-.45485	-.26951	-7.846	51	.000

The result of the t-test answers the question of the effect of pause pattern utilisation in sentence processing in communicative effectiveness. It shows that there is a significant relation between the two variables. The degree of relation is sought by conducting Chi Square test on the questionnaire data gathered.

Taking into account the null and alternative hypotheses formed, rejected, and accepted in testing control and experimental group's mean scores, a Chi Square test was conducted to test the hypotheses acceptance and rejection unto the data gathered through questionnaire distribution. As shown in Figure 7 (a) and (b), The Pearson Chi Square results ($ChiSq =$

220.2, $df = 50$, $p = 0.0001$) seemed to indicate significant association between the utilisation of pause pattern in sentence processing and communicative effectiveness, thus supporting H_1 . The strength or degree of association between utilisation of pause pattern and communicative effectiveness was found to be high at $C = 0.889$.

Fig. 7 (a) and (b): Chi Square Tests Results

(a) Chi Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	220.161 ^a	50	.000
Likelihood Ratio	106.447	50	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	.943	1	.332
N of Valid Cases	52		

63 cells (95.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .02._a

(b) Symmetric Measures

	Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal Contingency coeff.	.899	.000
N of Valid Cases	52	

A section in the questionnaire also seeks to investigate the perception of respondents in the experimental group towards the utilisation of pause pattern during the listening process in the experiment. All items in the section were evaluated using a modified Likert scale as follows:

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Agree
- 4 Strongly Agree

All in all, it can be said that the pause pattern was perceived as a moderate high facilitating prosody feature in the process of communicative comprehension. This can be seen by the overall mean score as the pause pattern scored 3.166 (SD=0.501). The determination of mean score interpretation is referred to mean score interpretation table as suggested by Nunnally (1972). The following table indicates that the item that scored the highest mean value was item 1. This item scored 3.289 (SD=0.457). The respondents basically agreed with the statement in item 1 “*The meaning of the utterances in the audio is clear*”. It can be seen that the respondents understood the utterance as used in the audio as well as the ease in recognising the pause in each utterance in the audio recording.

Fig.8: Perception of Pause Pattern Utilisation

Item	Frequency and Percentage (N=15)				Mean	SD	INT
	SD	D	A	SA			
1 The meaning of the utterances in the audio is clear.	-	-	37 (71.2%)	15 (28.8%)	3.289	0.457	MH
2 Pause between phrases is indicated clearly in the audio.	-	3 (5.8%)	34 (65.4%)	15 (28.8%)	3.231	0.546	MH
3 Identifying words said during listening to the audio is an easy task.	-	7 (13.5%)	31 (59.6%)	14 (26.9%)	3.135	0.627	MH
4 The pronunciation in the audio is very clear.	-	4 (7.7%)	34 (65.4%)	14 (26.9%)	3.192	0.561	MH
5 I notice the continuation of ideas in the conversation very easily.	-	3 (5.8%)	47 (90.4%)	2 (3.8%)	2.981	0.313	ML
Overall mean of Most Facilitating Prosody Feature: Pause Pattern					3.166	0.501	MH

The study found that the experimental group shown a trend of better achievement in the listening assessment as compared to the control group. As the null hypothesis stated that there was no significant difference in communicative competence due to the utilisation of pause pattern, it was proven to be true in relation to the control group.

The formation and acceptance of alternative hypothesis shown that the respondents in experimental group performed better in the listening assessment; hence showing the relation between utilisation of pause pattern that facilitated communicative effectiveness. This is further supported by the findings in the Chi Square tests and data gathered from the

questionnaire, seeking to investigate the respondents' perception towards the pause pattern utilisation.

Thus, from the study, it is found that the utilisation of pause pattern in sentence processing plays a significant role in communicative effectiveness among second language users in Malaysia.

CONCLUSION

This study is conducted in order to identify the effect of utilisation of pause pattern in sentence processing and communicative effectiveness among second language users in Malaysia. It is also conducted in order to gather feedbacks from second language users and determine the level of relation between utilisation of pause pattern and the process of comprehending spoken interaction.

As mentioned by Cole, et. al., (2010), prosody plays an important function in speech communication. A listener must be attentive to this phonetic variation in order to reconstruct the prosody context and to understand the meaning of an utterance as intended by the speaker. Through the analysis of the results obtained in this study, it is revealed that prosody, namely the pause pattern, assisted the listening process and enables the conveyed message to reach the listener as intended.

In this study, the respondents' test results in the experiment carried out showed an insightful difference in the respondents' understanding of the utterance heard in the audio recording. By looking at the mean scores of both groups, it is evident that the experimental group gained better results. Some improvement was also seen in results of respondents in control group. Nonetheless, the improvement was proven to be insignificant. This is due to acceptance of null hypothesis in t-test conducted which stated that there was no relation between pause pattern utilisation and communicative effectiveness among second language users in the control group.

On the contrary, the same hypothesis was rejected when tested on experimental group, thus allowing an alternative hypothesis to be accepted. The alternative hypothesis stated that there was a significant relation between pause pattern utilisation and communicative effectiveness among second language users in the experimental group.

As proposed by Teilanyo (2010), prosody, namely the pause pattern helps in suggesting importance of utterance to the brain. In this study, it was found that pause pattern becomes useful when it assisted the respondents to comprehend the audio recording even though they only have one chance to listen while answering the questions in the test paper simultaneously. Throughout this study, the pause pattern is found to be a moderately-high facilitating feature in assisting comprehension during listening. By having this knowledge, listeners would be able to make connections with orientation and prediction in a conversation (Gilbert, 2008). In this study, pause pattern is found to be helpful in assisting the respondents to comprehend utterances in the listening test. In conclusion, it is found that utilisation of pause pattern assists communication process and it is best done by maximising the use of pause in order to convey the intended message to the audience.

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