

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

This chapter aimed to review the literature and research relevant to the examination of the relationship between the English achievement and the listening achievement by Thai learners of English. It was organized into 4 sections: the National Test (NT), test questions, listening (definition, importance of listening and listening achievement test), and studied on English listening skill.

National Test (NT)

The National Test is the general achievement test. It is the written standard test of Thailand which is designed by the Bureau of Education Testing of the Office of the Basic Education Commission. It is used to test students' general achievement since the academic year 2001. In the academic years 2001, 2002, and 2004, the Provincial Chief of Education Department randomized 10 percent of students in each district to do the NT. Nevertheless, in the academic years 2003 and 2005, every student had to do the NT. It is used to investigate the academic achievement of Thai students in Grade 3, Grade 6, Grade 9, and Grade 12. It tests 3rd and 6th graders' academic achievement in the following four subjects: English, Mathematics, Science, and Thai, while it tests 9th and 12th graders' academic achievement in five subjects: Thai, Mathematics, Science, English and Social Studies. Its results will be used to assess the national academic management for developing educational quality. Its aim is for students to use their NT score to develop their academic knowledge and achievement. In conclusion, NT is emphasized to assess students' knowledge and understanding, and analytical and processing skills in major subjects (Bureau of Education Testing, 2004).

The NT consists of multiple - choice questions, four choices for each item. In the English test part, there are 40 questions (See a complete test in Appendix H). The time for doing this part is 60 minutes. The test aims to investigate 6th graders' achievement as follows:

1. Communication skill, (20 questions)

1.1 Learners should be able to use spoken and written languages for exchanging information and presenting feeling or emotion (13 questions), and

1.2 Learners should be able to use spoken and written languages that are appropriate for social interaction and culture of the language (7 questions).

2. Language knowledge and thinking process (20 questions)

2.1 Learners should be able to understand sentences, short messages, pictures, symbols, to transfer information, and to draw pictures, or symbols to sentences or short messages (3 questions),

2.2 Learners should be able to give details from passages or to give details which supports a main idea or process (3 questions),

2.3 Learners should be able to understand the meaning of vocabularies, sentences, and messages (8 questions),

2.4 Learners should be able to interpret passages, to find main ideas, and to tell the relationship between specific information and hidden information (2 questions) and,

2.5 Learners should be able to present ideas and simple information about oneself (4 questions). (Education Evaluation and Assessment Group, 2004)

Note that the NT is a written test. It is used to test students' overall English communication skill, language knowledge, and thinking process through pen - and - paper test approach. Even in the communication skill section, it is tested through written questions not the authentic speaking - and - listening.

The National Test Construction

To achieve the standard of the test, the Bureau of Education Testing of the Office of the Basic Education Commission constructs and develops the NT in the following steps;

First, objectives of the quality assessment of the Basic Education are set. Second, theories, approaches, curriculum, and related studies for construction the NT are studied. Third, the assessment framework and format is set by the NT construction committee, teachers, educational supervisors, scholars, assessors, and academic experts. Fourth, the NT construction committee constructs the NT according to the framework and format. All test items are criticized and verified for the validity by the

NT construction committee. Fifth, the NT is pilot - tested with a sampling group who are selected by stratified random sampling. Sixth, the quality of the NT, difficulty, discrimination, and reliability are analyzed for the computed statistic values and the test items are adjusted according to the statistic values until the realizable and valid test is obtained. The good quality of the NT must have the difficulty value between .02 - .08 and the discrimination value at least .02. Seventh, the NT is revised and re-tested with a different sampling group who are selected by stratified random sampling. Eighth, the test result is analyzed. The accepted result of the difficulty of the whole test must be about .50. The range of the difficulty used is between .02 - .80, and the reliability value must be between .07 - .08. Then the NT construction committee checks the validity of the NT. The IOC approach is used to find out the NT validity. The content validity, validated with the curriculum, of the NT must be 1.00. Ninth, the NT construction committee, who are curriculum and assessment expertise teachers, set assessment criteria. Finally, the manuscript of the NT is sent to a press to print (Bureau of Education Testing, 2004).

As the NT is constructed by the experts and tried out with the different sampling groups twice, and its results are adjusted until having an appropriate discrimination value, difficulty value, and reliability value. Therefore, all of the National Tests are considered as standard tests, which have reliability and validity, to assess students' general academic achievement.

Examples of the National Test in the English Subject

The examples on the next page were taken from the National Test in the English subject for 6th graders in the academic year 2005. The complete test was included in Appendix H.

Although there are two main parts in the NT in English: 1.) communication skill, and 2.) language knowledge and thinking process, only the communication skill part which is concerned with students' communication achievement conformed to the objectives of this study. Therefore, the researcher illustrated the first part of the NT. This part consists of two subparts. There are 13 questions for the first subpart and 7 questions for the second subpart. The objective of the first subpart is to use speaking (through reading skills not actual speaking) and

writing skills for exchanging information and presenting feeling or emotion. Examples of this part were presented below.

Directions: Complete the conversation with the most suitable answer from 1.), 2.), 3.), or 4.). (Questions 1 - 20)

1.

Jane	:	Peter, this is Kate.
Kate	:	How do you do?
Peter	:

1.) Good morning.

3.) How do you do?

2.) Fine, thank you.

4.) The same to you.

2.

Bob	:	It's time to go now. See you later.
Billy	:

1.) Good bye.

3.) Nice to see you.

2.) Your bus's coming.

4.) Well done.

The objective of the second subpart is to use spoken and written language that appropriate with social interaction and culture of the language (7 questions). This subpart is ranged from question 14 to question 20. Its examples were illustrated below.

Pam wants a scholarship. She is speaking to Mr. Smith.

Mr. Smith: Introduce yourself, please.

Pam : _____ 14 _____ .

Mr. Smith: _____ 15 _____ ?

Pam : Grade six, sir.

14. 1.) How are you?

3.) My name's Pam.

2.) Nice to talk to you.

4.) This is Pam.

15. 1.) Where are you from

3.) How much do you weigh

2.) What class are you in

4.) How tall are you

The strong point of the NT is it is the only national standard test, which is used to test students' communication skill, language knowledge and thinking process. It was assumed to reflect students' English knowledge in the facets of grammar, vocabularies, reading comprehension, and communication proficiencies. Although it is a written test, it was hoped to test students' English achievement which mirrored their real communication proficiency. Because of the difficulty and time consumption in testing their communication proficiency directly, the NT was used. However, it may or may not reflect students' real communication proficiency, especially their speaking and listening proficiencies. Therefore, this study was intended to find out whether the overall English achievement based on the students' NT score was a good predictor of the students' English listening skill.

Test Questions

There are various types of test questions for constructing research instrument. However, only three types of test question; true - false, matching test items, and multiple - choice are presented here as they are employed as the research instrument, the listening test, in the current study. Duvall (2007) describes the characteristics and advantages of the multiple - choice, true - false, and matching test items as follows.

1. True - False Test Items

A true - false item can be written in one of three forms: simple, complex, or compound. Answers can consist of only two choices (simple), more than two choices (complex), or two choices plus a conditional completion response (compound).

Advantages in Using True - False Items

True - false items have strengths as they provide the widest sampling of content or objectives per unit of testing time as well as give the efficiency and accuracy in scoring. They also have the objective measurement of student achievement or ability. Moreover, they have highly reliable test scores and versatility in measuring all levels of cognitive ability.

Limitations in Using True - False Items

True - false items also have disadvantages as follows. First, they incorporate an extremely high guessing factor. For simple true - false items, each student has a 50/50 chance of correctly answering the item without any knowledge of the item's content. Secondly, they can often lead an instructor to write ambiguous statements due to the difficulty of writing statements which are unequivocally true or false. Also, they do not discriminate between students of varying ability as well as other item types. Fourth, they can often include more irrelevant clues than do other item types. Finally, they can often lead an instructor to favor testing of trivial knowledge.

2. Matching Test Items

In general, matching items consist of a column of stimuli presented on the left side of the exam page and a column of responses placed on the right side of the page. Students are required to match the response associated with a given stimulus. However, in the current study the stimuli are illustrated in the form of pictures and the responses are presented in the form of a sentence which describing each picture.

Advantages in Using Matching Items

Matching items are beneficial for assessment because they require short periods of reading and response time, allowing you to cover more content. In addition, they provide objective measurement of student achievement r ability, highly reliable test scores, and scoring efficiency and accuracy.

Limitations in Using Matching Items

Matching items have difficulty measuring learning objectives requiring more than simple recall of information, and they are hard to construct due to the problem of selecting a common set of stimuli and responses.

3. Multiple - Choice Test Items

The multiple - choice item consists of two parts: (a) the stem, which identifies the question or problem and (b) the response alternatives. Students are asked to select the one alternative that best completes the statement or answers the question.

Advantages in Using Multiple - Choice Items

Multiple - choice items can provide several benefits. First, they have versatility in measuring all levels of cognitive ability. Second, they provide highly

reliable test scores, and also provide efficient and accurate scoring. Third, they give objective measurement of student achievement or ability and provide wide sampling of content or objectives. Next, they reduce guessing factor when compared to true - false items. Finally, they consist of different response alternatives which can provide diagnostic feedback

Limitations in Using Multiple - Choice Items

Despite the advantages mentioned above, multiple - choice items have three main weaknesses. First, they are difficult and time consuming to construct. Besides, they lead an instructor to favor simple recall of facts. Also, they place a high degree of dependence on the student's reading ability and instructor's writing ability.

However, these three weak points of test items have a mutual characteristic. That is, they provide objective measurement of student achievement as they provide highly reliable test scores. In addition, time for students to do a test of this type and for a researcher to rate scores is spent less than other test types.

Listening

The Definitions of Listening

Definitions of listening have been proposed by various scholars as follows.

Barker (1971, p. 17) defines listening as the selective process of attending to, hearing, understanding, and remembering aural symbols.

Chastian (1976, p. 20) states that listening is the ability to discriminate between the significant sounds and intonation patterns of language, perceive an oral message, keep the communication in mind while it is being processed, and finally understand the contained message.

Underwood (1990, p. 1) views listening as the activity of paying attention to and trying to get meaning from those spoken words. To get success in listening, we need to be able to interpret what speakers mean when they use particular words in particular ways on particular occasions.

Purdy (1997, p. 8) defines listening as the active and dynamic process of attending, perceiving, interpreting, remembering, and responding to the expressed (verbal and nonverbal), needs, concerns, and information offered by other human beings.

Nunan (1999, p. 109) mentions that listening is one of the basic skills in learning a language. Listening gives human knowledge and understanding of the world and human activities including attitude, valuation and pleasure. He divides listening into four levels:

1. Listening without attention but the listener can gain some knowledge
2. Listening for entertainment where the listener can gain knowledge accidentally
3. Listening for instruction
4. Listening with criticism

Saricoban (1999, p. 1 as cited in Martom, Mabao, & Sinananwanit, 2004) views listening to and understanding speech involving the following basic processes: linguistic competence, previous knowledge, and psychological variables. A listener integrates these variables to help him/ her understand a speaker's utterance as the speaker intends to communicate.

From various views of many scholars, listening is not simply hearing or perceiving speech sounds. It can be concluded that listening is an active process involving four interrelated activities: receiving aural stimuli, attending to spoken words, attaching meaning to aural symbols, and responding to oral communication. Listening refers to more than just perception of sounds; a listening process also requires an act of attending to the speech sounds and trying to understand the message, which may or may not be fulfilled.

Importance of Listening

Listening is the first language skill developed; it comes before speaking, reading, and writing and is a basic to language acquisition (Vandergrift, 2002; Quek - Ng and Kooi Lian, 1994; Wolvin & Coakley, 1988 and Devine, 1982 as cited in Thanajaro, 2000). In the verbal communication time spent by college students, they spent 52.5 percent in listening, 17.3 percent in reading, 16.3 percent in speaking, and 13.9 percent in writing (Barker, Edwards, Gaines, Gladney, and Holley, 1980 as cited

in Thanajaro, 2000). But students from kindergarten through high school were expected to listen 65 - 90 percent of the time (Gilbert, 1988 as cited in Thanajaro, 2000). In conclusion, both in and out of the classroom, students consume much more time of daily communication for listening than other forms of verbal communication (Wolvin and Coakley, 1988 as cited in Thanajaro, 2000).

People have main reasons for listening (Kathleen Galvin, n.d., as cited in Underwood, 1990, p. 4), and the reasons generally fall under one or more of these categories:

1. to engage in social rituals
2. to exchange information
3. to exert control
4. to share feelings
5. to enjoy oneself

From the studies mentioned above, it can be concluded that listening is crucial for daily communication. We cannot achieve in verbal communication without listening. This is particularly true for foreign language learners. They have to pay much attention to L2 verbal message for their mutual understanding between a speaker and a hearer.

Listening Achievement Test

According to Heaton (1975), a listening achievement test is divided into 2 levels:

1. sound discrimination, word stress, sentence intonation proficiency, and
2. listening comprehension proficiency.

Furthermore, to test students' listening comprehension, a test is divided into 2 levels: to test extensive and intensive listening skills. For testing extensive listening skills, a teacher can do by using multiple - choice questions, short answer questions, and information transfer techniques. For testing intensive listening skills, a teacher can test by using dictation and listening recall techniques (Weir, 1990, pp. 51 - 58). Testing students' listening achievement is different in design, depending on teachers and the educational goal of each nation. For the English curriculum of Grade 6 of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development of Thailand, the main

goal of an English listening test is to test students' comprehension which is crucial for daily communication (Ministry of Education, 2002). Thus, to make the study consistent with the national goal of learning English, this study aimed to examine students' listening comprehension achievement through the research instrument with true - false, matching, and multiple - choice questions, which the researcher designed by using the English curriculum of Grade 6 as a guideline.

Studies on English Listening Skill

This section has two main parts: studies of English listening skills conducted in Thailand and those done outside Thailand.

Studies Conducted in Thailand

According to the database found, there have been several studies on English listening skills of Thai students (e.g., Prapphal and Ophanon-ammata, 2002; Sukamolson, 1989 as cited in Wongsathorn, 1993; Cheevacharoenkul, 1980; and Mitipat, 1979 as cited in Cheevacharoenkul, 1980).

Prapphal and Ophanon-ammata (2002) investigated the English proficiency of Thai graduates. The research was to study the listening, writing and reading abilities of Thai graduates with bachelors' degrees from universities in Thailand and to compare their English abilities with graduates from Southeast Asian countries. The subjects were 9,154 Thai graduates from universities in Thailand who would like to pursue their studies at the Graduate School of Chulalongkorn University. Besides, there were data taken from the TOEFL (refers to the Test of English as a Foreign Language) Test and Score Data Summary Bulletins, of 184,971 graduates from other countries in Southeast Asia and 183,822 Thai graduates who wanted to further their studies abroad. The CU - TEP (comes from the Chulalongkorn University Test of English Proficiency) was used as the research instrument which had been equated with TOEFL. There were 30 items in the listening part. It was a multiple - choice test. It used to test the graduates' abilities in listening to conversation, interview, and lecture. It was the semi- academic contents and the daily life situations. The length of time for testing was 30 minutes. It was found that Thai students who took the CU - TEP in 2001 could not meet the standard required to study at the graduate level at Chulalongkorn University. From three tested English skills: listening

comprehension, reading comprehension, and writing, science graduates and non - science graduates did the worst on listening, but they did the best in reading comprehension. The graduates who wanted to study in international programs did the best on listening, followed by writing and reading respectively. Besides, they got the highest scores among three groups.

(Sukamolson 1989 as cited in Wongsathorn, 1993) studied the levels of English skills in the sound modality of Thai students between 1972 and 1988. The study revealed that the listening skill of 9th graders was very poor, while university students had moderate listening skill. Students in Grade 9 had difficulties of listening to dialogues, texts, and pronunciation, but upper secondary students had problems of listening comprehension and critical listening.

Cheevacharoenkul (1980) studied the abilities in listening, reading, and writing English of the fourth year English teaching students in Higher Education Institutes in the south of Thailand: Yala Teachers' College; Songkhla Teachers' College; the faculty of Education, Prince of Songkhla University; and the faculty of Education, Srinakharinwirot Songkhla University. Cheevacharoenkul constructed the listening test to test the students' listening proficiency to phoneme discrimination, stress and intonation, tone, dialogue, and conversation and lecture. Her listening test was divided into 5 sections, 77 items, as follows:

Section 1: Phoneme discrimination

1. multiple – choice: 2 choices, 10 items
2. multiple – choice: 3 choices, 10 items

Section 2: Stress and intonation

1. multiple – choice: 4 choices, 20 items

Section 3: Tone

1. multiple – choice: 4 choices, 5 items

Section 4: Questions, statements and dialogue

1. multiple – choice: 4 choices, 20 items

Section 5: Conversation and lecture

1. multiple – choice: 4 choices, 12 items

Cheevacharoenkul's findings presented that 84 fourth year English teaching students in higher education institutes in the south of Thailand: Yala Teachers' College; Songkhla Teachers' College; the faculty of Education, Prince of Songkhla University; and the faculty of Education, Srinakharinwirot Songkhla University, had a problem with listening. To conclude, the students' listening test scores were 63.80 percent that was below the criterion set. The criterion set used in her study is 80 percent of the total score of the test. In addition, she found that the students had a serious problem with listening comprehension. Cheevacharoenkul recommended that lecturers should teach more listening to their students with the hope that students can use English for communication and apply the knowledge from listening to their English teaching in the future.

(Mitipat, 1979 as cited in Cheevacharoenkul, 1980, p. 34) investigated 9th graders' English listening ability of the secondary schools inside and outside Muang District in Nakhonratchasima Province. By comparing with a criterion, 60 percent of the total score of the test, it was found that the students who lived inside Muang District had a problem of listening comprehension. In contrast, the students who lived outside Muang District had listening problems in three aspects: consonant and vowel sounds in a word, high - low tone in a sentence, and understanding a situation of speaking.

From reviewed research studies conducted in Thailand, it can be concluded that Thais have a more serious problem with English listening comprehension, compared with other English skills, and need to improve specially in this area.

Studies Conducted Outside Thailand

Various listening studies are found: Vandergrift, 2006; Deterding, 2005; Riney, Takagi, and Inutsuka, 2005; Field, 2005; Jenkin, 1996 as cited in Levis, 1999; Martin, 1982 as cited in Celce - Murcia & Olshtain, 2000; and Celce - Murcia, 1980 as cited in Celce - Murcia & Olshtain, 2000. These studies were presented below.

Recently, Vandergrift (2006) reported on a study exploring the respective contributions of first language (L1) listening comprehension ability and second language (L2) proficiency to L2 listening comprehension ability. Seventy - five English speaking students in Grade 8 who learned French were investigated. The

participants who completed the tests in French and in English were required to listen to authentic dialogues and to answer multiple choice comprehension questions. The findings revealed that both L1 listening comprehension ability and L2 proficiency contributed significantly to L2 listening comprehension ability. L2 proficiency had about twice as much common variance to L2 listening comprehension ability compared to L1 listening comprehension. Vandergrift's study initiates an exploration of the ability/proficiency debate since it relates to L2 listening comprehension ability. It is also discussed to imply the findings to L2 pedagogy, and suggested important avenues for further research.

(Jenkin's 1996 as cited in Levis, 1999) study illustrated the importance of segmentals. She recorded eight hours of interaction between nonnative speakers using English. It was found that 27 of 28 misunderstandings due to pronunciation involved segmental errors, either alone or in combination with prosodic factors. The errors often caused lack of understanding, and even contextual clues could not help the meaning clear. Jenkin concluded that miscommunication of some sort occurred in spite of the availability of extra linguistic information and still persisted even though the pronunciation error was corrected by the speaker.

Moreover, there is a study concerned with English listening comprehension problems, especially in low level learners. Martin (1982 as cited in Celce - Murcia & Olshtain, 2000, p. 107) asked five native speakers of Spanish to listen to short but complete radio broadcast segments and then give immediate paraphrases (in English or Spanish) of what they had heard. She also asked them to introspect and report back on their problems. It was found that subjects employed two different strategies:

(1.) bottom - up word level strategies (which associate meanings with specific words) and (2.) top - down idea level strategies (which deal with establishment of a topic and help relate all subsequent meaning bits to the main idea).

Martin's data indicated that three progressive stages seemed to underlie the listening process for these L2 learners:

1. An initial orientation period when the listener got used to the physical features, i.e., the speaker's voice quality and pronunciation, rate of speech, and vocabulary.

2. A search for a main idea that began with the listener taking in words, phrases, and/ or clauses.

3. New incoming information was matched against the perceived main idea and/ or the listener's previous knowledge.

Martin speculated that these three stages interacted and probably were often used automatically.

From the database, there have been some studies about mishearing. For example, an examination of written transcripts of audio - recorded speech was prepared by advanced second language learners at UCLA (University of California – Los Angeles). The findings were as follows: verbs (e.g., thought for fraught), personal names (e.g., down the reed instead of Donna Reed), and idioms (e.g. more stuff and barrel for lock, stock, and barrel) were often misheard. It concluded that in fact proper names and idioms were prime candidates for mishearing even by native speakers (Celce - Murcia & Olshtain, 2000, p. 106 citing Celce - Murcia, 1980).

Furthermore, low - level learners could even misconstrue the hesitation phenomena produced by native speakers as words (Celce - Murcia & Olshtain, 2000, p. 106 citing Voss, 1979; Griffiths, 1991): Uh heard as a, Huh? heard as up?, Hmm heard as him.

From reviewing listening studies, it can be summarized that Thais have a serious problem of English listening comprehension (Prapphal, 2001; Cheevacharoenkul, 1980; and Mitipat, 1979 as cited in Cheevacharoenkul, 1980) and Thais have to improve their English listening much more. While listening, a listener uses bottom - up and top - down strategies to help him/ her to understand a speaker's speech (Martin, 1982 as cited in Celce - Murcia & Olshtain, 2000). However, sometimes a L2 listener may misunderstand a speaker's speech since he/ she often mishears verbs, personal names, and idioms. Even native speakers' proper names and idioms were prime mishearings (Celce - Murcia & Olshtain, 2000, p. 106 citing Celce - Murcia, 1980). Especially a low - level learner may misunderstand that hesitation phenomena produced by native speakers as words (Celce - Murcia & Olshtain, 2000, p. 106 citing Voss, 1979 and Griffiths, 1991). There is only one study which is concerned with the relationship between L2 proficiency and L2 listening proficiency

and it uncovers that L2 proficiency contributes significantly to L2 listening ability (Vandergrif, 2006).

In conclusion, there are many studies about listening ability which concerned with either the subjects' abilities or problems in L2 listening, while there is only one study of the relationship between the L2 learners' achievement and L2 learners' listening achievement. Therefore, it was interesting to uncover this issue with a hope that the findings from this study would mirror the Thai students of English listening achievement. The findings would unfold the question, whether or not there was the relationship between students' overall English achievement and their listening achievement. If there were not any relationships between these variables, English teachers should adjust the English courses to meet the need of equal portion of the four English skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills stated in the National Curriculum for achieving the English communication goal. For instance, students must practice more listening skills in English class and teachers should insert a listening test in an English test. When students do not master enough in English listening skill, they may face up with the difficulty in verbal communication which leads to communication breakdown. To understand the nature of the relationship between L2 listening comprehension achievement and overall English achievement, the researcher examined the mediating role of each of these two variables in listener ability to answer each question type: monologue, sentence, conversation, and sign. The study also attempted to find out which type of questions students respond to effectively and which ones require special attention. The results will be useful for English teachers to implement the test questions that are related to as a guideline to improve the students' listening skill in each question type. The next chapter included the methodology of the current study.