

DISCUSSING THE BENEFITS OF SHADOWING TECHNIQUE IN IMPROVING PRONUNCIATION FOR FIRST-YEAR ENGLISH MAJORS

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ABSTRACT

This study discusses the effectiveness of the shadowing technique in improving English pronunciation among first-year English majors. Pronunciation is essential for effective communication, yet many freshmen face challenges due to differences between English and their native language. The shadowing method—where learners listen and immediately repeat native speech—offers a practical approach to enhancing pronunciation skills. The paper highlights three key benefits: (1) developing strong listening skills as the foundation for accurate pronunciation, (2) improving speaking fluency and building confidence, and (3) providing an accessible, flexible, and cost-effective method suitable for beginners. While acknowledging certain challenges, such as the difficulty of shadowing fast speech, the study argues that these obstacles can be overcome through guided practice and appropriate material selection. Overall, shadowing is presented as a powerful tool for supporting first-year students in building clearer, more natural English pronunciation.

Keywords: *Shadowing technique, Pronunciation improvement, Listening skills, Speaking fluency, First-year English majors, Freshman students, English language learning, Autonomous learning, Pronunciation practice, Language acquisition*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Importance of Pronunciation

Pronunciation is a fundamental aspect of learning English, directly impacting communication and mutual understanding between speakers. According to Derwing and Munro (2005), pronunciation proficiency strongly influences listeners' perceptions of language ability. Even if a learner has a rich vocabulary or strong grammar knowledge, poor pronunciation can hinder effective communication and make it difficult for listeners to understand. Additionally, good pronunciation helps learners be easily understood and boosts their confidence when speaking. When learners are confident in their pronunciation, they are less likely to feel anxious during conversations, which in turn encourages them to use English more effectively and naturally in both academic and professional settings.

1.2 The Situation of First-Year English Majors

First-year English majors often face difficulties in mastering accurate English pronunciation. The differences between the phonetics of English and Vietnamese pose significant challenges for students, making it harder for them to pronounce words correctly. These linguistic disparities can lead to confusion and hinder students' ability to communicate effectively in English.

1.3. Introduction to the Shadowing Technique

The shadowing technique is a listen-and-repeat method in which learners closely imitate what native speakers say, mimicking their pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation in real-time. This technique allows students to engage

both their listening and speaking skills actively. With regular practice, shadowing can significantly improve pronunciation by helping learners internalize the natural patterns of spoken English.

1.4. Thesis Statement

This essay will discuss three main benefits of the shadowing technique in improving English pronunciation for first-year English majors: (1) enhancing listening skills, (2) increasing confidence and fluency in speaking, and (3) being accessible and effective for beginner learners.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 Shadowing Enhances Listening Skills – The Foundation of Good Pronunciation

One of the most significant benefits of the shadowing technique is its positive impact on listening skills, which serve as the foundation for accurate and effective pronunciation. Listening is the first step in acquiring the sounds of a new language. Without a well-developed ability to perceive and distinguish sounds, it is difficult for learners to reproduce them accurately. The shadowing technique requires learners to listen attentively and repeat what they hear almost simultaneously. Saito and Hanzawa (2019) emphasized that intensive listening combined with repetition promotes better phonological awareness. This process trains students to focus on the subtle elements of spoken English, such as syllable articulation, intonation patterns, and rhythm.

Through regular practice, learners become more sensitive to these elements and can recognize sounds that are often overlooked in traditional language classes. For example, many Vietnamese learners struggle with final consonant sounds or reduced forms in English due to the differences in phonological systems between the two languages. Shadowing provides an opportunity to repeatedly hear and imitate these features, gradually internalizing them through auditory exposure and immediate verbal reproduction. As learners pay closer attention to how each syllable is stressed or how intonation rises and falls, they are more likely to reproduce these patterns accurately in their own speech.

In addition to improving listening accuracy, shadowing enhances learners' ability to imitate native pronunciation and stress. This includes mimicking vowel quality, consonant articulation, and prosodic features such as pitch and timing. The act of mirroring native speech not only reinforces correct pronunciation but also helps learners develop a more natural and fluent speaking style. Over time, this imitation becomes more automatic, allowing learners to speak more clearly and understandably without conscious effort.

Empirical studies support these claims. Tamai (1997) emphasized that shadowing significantly boosts listening comprehension by strengthening learners' ability to process spoken input in real-time. Murphey (2001) also highlighted the technique's role in improving both receptive and productive pronunciation skills. Together, these studies confirm that shadowing is more than just a mimicry exercise—it is an active listening process that builds the auditory foundation essential for successful pronunciation development.

2.2 Shadowing Improves Fluency and Confidence in Pronunciation

Another key advantage of the shadowing technique is its ability to enhance learners' fluency and boost their confidence when speaking English. One of the core features of shadowing is that it requires students to repeat spoken language immediately after hearing it, often without a pause. This trains learners to respond quickly and automatically, helping them develop fast, natural speech reflexes. As a result, students gradually move away from translating in their heads or hesitating before speaking. Instead, they begin to speak more fluidly, with improved rhythm and pacing, which are essential components of fluency.

Furthermore, shadowing trains learners to pronounce words and phrases without stopping to think about each element. This shift from conscious articulation to automatic production allows students to express themselves more naturally, mirroring the spontaneous flow of native speakers. By practicing regularly, learners become more comfortable with longer chunks of speech and connected sentences, rather than isolated words.

Shadowing also plays a crucial role in reducing speaking anxiety, which is a common issue among first-year English majors. Ev and Sariçoban (2023) found that using the shadowing technique significantly improved B1-level learners' confidence and reduced their speaking anxiety. Many students feel nervous or self-conscious about their pronunciation when speaking in real-life situations. The repetitive nature of shadowing familiarizes them with common speech patterns and boosts their comfort level in using English aloud. As students grow accustomed to speaking continuously and hearing their voices produce accurate sounds, their fear of making mistakes diminishes. This increase in confidence directly translates into better classroom performance and a greater willingness to engage in conversations outside of class.

When compared to more traditional pronunciation methods, such as learning individual words in isolation, shadowing proves to be far more effective. While memorizing the pronunciation of single words might help in the short term, it does not teach students how to apply pronunciation in real communicative contexts. Shadowing, by contrast, places pronunciation within meaningful, natural language use. This contextualized practice enables learners to understand how pronunciation interacts with sentence structure, rhythm, and emphasis—skills that are essential for effective spoken communication.

2.3 Shadowing Is Accessible and Suitable for First-Year Students

One of the most appealing aspects of the shadowing technique is its accessibility, making it especially suitable for first-year English majors. Unlike some language learning methods that require expensive resources or formal instruction, shadowing is a cost-effective technique that can be practiced using basic tools. Students only need a device with audio playback capabilities—such as a smartphone, tablet, or computer—and access to appropriate materials like podcasts, YouTube videos, or pronunciation-focused applications. This makes shadowing a budget-friendly option that aligns well with the financial limitations that many first-year students face.

In addition to its affordability, shadowing is highly convenient and flexible. It does not require learners to attend in-person classes or follow a rigid schedule. Instead, students can practice at home, in the library, or even during short breaks between classes. This flexibility allows them to integrate pronunciation practice into their daily routines, making it easier to maintain consistent learning habits. For beginners who may feel overwhelmed by academic demands or social adjustments, shadowing offers a low-pressure, self-paced way to develop essential language skills. Moreover, the technique can be seamlessly combined with a variety of modern learning tools. Motohashi-Saigo and Hardison (2009) demonstrated that visualized speech technologies combined with shadowing enhance learners' pronunciation accuracy. Today's students have access to countless online resources that make shadowing both engaging and effective. For example, YouTube provides an endless selection of videos featuring native speakers, while mobile applications like ELSA Speak offer personalized feedback on pronunciation. English-language podcasts also serve as valuable materials for listening and repetition. These tools not only expose learners to authentic English but also allow them to monitor their progress, set goals, and stay motivated.

By leveraging these resources, students can transform shadowing into a dynamic and interactive learning experience. The ability to choose topics of personal interest—whether related to entertainment, education, or everyday life—adds another layer of relevance and enjoyment. As a result, shadowing becomes more than just a pronunciation exercise; it becomes a habit that fits naturally into the learner's lifestyle, ultimately leading to more sustainable and meaningful language development.

2.4 Limitations of the Shadowing Technique

While the shadowing technique offers numerous benefits for improving English pronunciation, it is important to acknowledge that it also comes with certain limitations, particularly for beginners. One of the main challenges first-year students may face is the speed and complexity of native speech. Since shadowing requires learners to repeat what they hear almost immediately, the fast pace and unfamiliar pronunciation patterns can be overwhelming at first. Students who are not yet comfortable with listening to authentic spoken English may struggle to keep up, leading to frustration and discouragement.

Additionally, shadowing demands a certain level of consistency and patience. Unlike methods that yield quick results, the benefits of shadowing tend to appear gradually over time. Students who expect immediate improvement in their pronunciation might feel disheartened if they do not notice progress right away. This feeling can be intensified if learners are not properly guided on how to use the technique effectively. Without clear instructions or feedback, students may mimic sounds inaccurately or focus too much on repetition without understanding the nuances of intonation, stress, or rhythm.

Moreover, shadowing can sometimes feel monotonous or repetitive, especially when learners are not engaging with content that interests them. If students choose materials that are too difficult or not aligned with their personal preferences, they may lose motivation quickly. Therefore, to maximize the effectiveness of shadowing, it is crucial to combine it with enjoyable and level-appropriate content, as well as to provide learners with strategies for active listening and pronunciation awareness.

Despite these limitations, most of the challenges associated with shadowing can be addressed through gradual exposure, proper training, and encouragement. With persistence and the right resources, even beginners can overcome initial difficulties and benefit significantly from the technique.

2.5 Counterarguments and Solutions

Although the shadowing technique may present certain difficulties for beginners, these challenges are by no means insurmountable. In fact, with proper guidance and consistent practice, most students can overcome the initial obstacles and experience noticeable improvements in their pronunciation. One of the most effective ways to address the difficulties of shadowing is through clear instructions on how to use the technique correctly. Educators or language mentors can provide demonstrations, tips on selecting suitable materials, and strategies for breaking down complex speech patterns. For example, students can begin by shadowing slower and simpler dialogues before progressing to more advanced content.

Persistence also plays a crucial role in mastering the shadowing method. Like any skill, pronunciation improvement requires time and regular effort. By committing to short daily practice sessions, students can gradually build their listening and speaking abilities. Over time, what once felt too fast or difficult will become more manageable. Importantly, learners should be encouraged to focus on progress rather than perfection—every small step counts toward long-term improvement.

Moreover, combining shadowing with high-quality learning materials can significantly enhance its effectiveness. When students use well-structured podcasts, pronunciation apps, or videos created for English learners, they are more likely to practice accurately and stay motivated. Some resources even include subtitles, transcript support, or AI feedback, which can help learners track their pronunciation and better understand where they need to improve. These tools make shadowing more interactive, informative, and rewarding.

In conclusion, while the shadowing technique may initially seem intimidating, these drawbacks can be effectively managed with the right approach. Through structured instruction, consistent effort, and the use of appropriate learning materials, first-year English majors can overcome early difficulties and take full advantage of the benefits shadowing has to offer.

3. CONCLUSION

In summary, the shadowing technique offers a range of significant benefits for first-year English majors seeking to improve their pronunciation. It enhances students' listening skills—an essential foundation for accurate pronunciation—by training them to recognize and replicate the subtle features of native speech, including intonation, rhythm, and stress. Moreover, it promotes greater fluency and confidence by encouraging immediate speech production and reducing hesitation during communication. One of the key advantages of shadowing is its accessibility; it requires minimal resources, can be practiced independently at home, and integrates seamlessly with modern learning tools such as YouTube videos, podcasts, and pronunciation apps.

Given these advantages, shadowing stands out as a practical and effective approach for first-year students who are navigating the challenges of English language learning. In today's educational context, where online learning and self-study play an increasingly important role, shadowing provides a flexible, engaging, and low-cost method for improving pronunciation. It empowers students to take charge of their learning and to make steady progress in developing clear and confident spoken English. Therefore, incorporating shadowing into regular language practice can serve as a powerful tool to support first-year English majors in building a strong foundation in pronunciation and overall communicative competence.

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