Listening for the Gist of Authentic TV News as a Basis of Language Learning (　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　)

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論 文 内 容 の 要 旨

Chapter 1

The focus of this chapter is to present the basic problem that English language instructors encounter when they want to assess their students' listening comprehension skills. That problem can be described as a lack of clear means of gauging how well students can demonstrate a clear understanding of the gist of an authentic English-language listening segment. Popular testing procedures such as the use of multiple-choice or cloze test questions may inadequately provide a means for students to show their level of comprehension. With the bare minimum of communication, they can indicate a choice from a list or fill in a blank with a word. It would seem apparent that the best way they can actively show their contextual understanding is to express themselves in full sentences, either orally or in writing, where guesswork is a far more limited option.

Japanese society from the grassroots to the upper echelons of government wants its students to develop practical English abilities, with more emphasis placed on oral communication in order to overcome historical and cultural obstacles to success. What needs to be at the forefront of listening comprehension is a means of providing students with the task of accessing digestible (i.e. short) authentic listening content. It is not only important for correct or incorrect assessments to be made, but also to discover what and how much students have understood. Once instructors are able to gather a considerable amount of information on their students lexical/grammatical deficiencies, they will have the basis for creating a syllabus that effectively incorporates the most common listening problems that need to be addressed.

Chapter 2

This chapter's purpose is to outline what features should be included when English language students are required to listen to a passage and how their responses can be effectively evaluated. The input of various reputable writers on this theme has helped to justify and shape the incorporation of these features into listening exercises and analysis that followed.

The vast array of oral sources of information makes it difficult to narrow down suitable content for the intended listeners. However, there is broad agreement among English language professionals that listening input should hold relevance and appeal for listeners, be easily accessible at a high level of technical quality, and be

supported by pre-listening information and pertinent post-listening tasks. In order to incorporate these features. the method that was commonly advocated by many of these writers was for learners to be exposed to significant passages of real (authentic) audio that requires interpretation of content as opposed to tasks such as identifying words or phrases out of any context or without actively communicating with regard to them. The latter option may be considered a skill that is worth developing for sharpening aural language skills, but explaining the gist of a passage is deemed to be a more meaningful exercise that relates directly with a learner's ability to communicate what he/she comprehends.

Quite often when learners have to actively express themselves, they make an assortment of errors and the instructor has to use his/her discretion as to which ones need to be addressed. For eliciting gist, global errors which obstruct comprehension are important in contrast to local errors which are less problematic (e.g. spelling, lack of articles) in general. The instructor needs to articulate a system of prioritizing errors on the basis of obstructiveness and do it with a high degree of consistency in order to find patterns that can be identified. Reliability will depend to a great extent on a sizable sample of responses, a sample of which was evaluated by three other English language instructors with the same university profile of students. To ensure that a large sample of students was surveyed, the results were taken from responses from two websites embedding an equal number of listening passages (i.e. seven each).

Once lexical/grammatical errors are identified and classified, they cannot automatically be considered representative of learners' English skills. As they arose from a listening comprehension experiment, it is fitting that they be compared to the errors that these same students make in free writing and speaking situations. The similarity of the nature and proportion of errors stemming from all three categories would go some way to providing a justification for the listening experiment being valuable as a means of assessing learners' general English ability. If differences arise among the categories, they can be noted and explained where possible.

Finally, it is fair to assume that the ability of learners to do language tasks is not solely due to their lexical/grammatical skills. Undoubtedly, there are other factors that need to be examined such as thematic content and the speed of speaker speech, especially if the transcripts of poorly-done video listening tasks do not reflect the error rankings that have been amassed. With regard to listening in particular, what needs to be uncovered is the extent to which learners misunderstood the content in relation to whether the content was actually understood but poorly-expressed. With full-sentence responses to listening comprehension passages, there will be evidence that applies to both categories.

Once all of the factors that may have contributed to global errors in comprehension are measured and prioritized, it may be possible to establish and reinforce a syllabus that is focused on dealing with the major difficulties that English learners of the surveyed profile have demonstrated. This is the purpose of this dissertation.

Chapter 3

This chapter lays out the procedures that are taken for fulfilling goals that were highlighted in Chapter 2. After an introduction of the participants and materials used in data collection, there is an outline of a series of experiments that are designed to isolate factors that may have instigated errors within listening comprehension responses.

The data was extracted from one hundred and eighty-seven 2nd year students from various faculties at Tohoku University. Each of them was exposed to short authentic news clips and required to answer questions based on the gist of them. The content was carefully chosen so that it would be not culturally-specific or specialized and would be able to stand alone without being overly dependent on pre-listening information.

The task was for students to access a webpage that contains an embedded video of roughly 30 seconds. Technical efforts were made to ensure that the videos were easily accessed, supported by pre-listening contextual information and connected to a means for answering questions based on the gist of the passage. Students are

given a question to answer based on the gist of a video segment, which they can submit through a connecting answer form.

· They are also required to submit a written comment (50 words+) in response to a question that concerns the video theme. Errors from this piece of free writing will later be compared with those created through listening comprehension. A voicemail device will also be used to record free oral comments (50 words+) from students based on the video themes. The errors committed through oral comments will be compared to the written ones. The goal of these comparisons is to find out whether errors are different in nature depending on how responses are communicated.

With regard to the listening comprehension task, nearly 4,000 responses have been collected through the website submissions. This raw data was classified by the instructor into five categories: 'Correct', 'Partially-Correct', Incorrect, 'Incomprehensible' and 'Non-Existent'. Inter-reliability of these results was featured by having three other instructors, who normally teach the same student profile, evaluate a sizable sample of the responses.

This general evaluation of students' responses is valuable in that it shows how well they can absorb short but authentic news clips in English. However, the structure of the listening exercise allows researchers to go further into exploring reasons why errors occurred, especially among the responses that were deemed as 'Partially-Correct' and 'Incorrect'. It remains to be determined whether the students simply misunderstood what they had heard or else poorly expressed the content that they did understand.

With the limited data that is available, it is difficult to ascertain why students misunderstood the content. However, patterns identified from the transcripts of the video may show where obstacles may have arisen. On the other hand, 'poorly expressed' responses provide plenty of information on lexical/grammatical errors that impeded communication. When these errors are sorted and prioritized, they provide strong evidence for eventual syllabus construction. Supplementary experiments including the comparison of student groups with one benefiting from a word list or comparing written and spoken comments under a controlled setting further add knowledge concerning the lexical/grammatical weaknesses that do occur.

A close connection between the types of errors identified from a holistic view of participant results and the responses participants gave for the most difficult video segments would justify the contention that lexical and grammatical factors are most significant in determining why participant responses were inadequate in this kind of listening comprehension exercise. However, if this relationship looks to be tenuous at best, then lexical/grammatical factors may not yet be regarded as being of overwhelming importance. Therefore, it becomes necessary to be open to the idea that other factors may have played a key role in the success and failure of participants in fulfilling the tasks.

One group of factors of possible significance can present difficulties for participants due to its connection to audiovisual oral input. These include video thematic content, the types of questions, the nationality of the speakers, the speech format and the speed of the oral output. In these situations, the problem for participants may not only lie with their knowledge of appropriate lexis or grammatical structures, but also with the manner in which this oral communication is relayed. Another group of factors has even less of a relationship with lexical and grammatical features and has more to do with the personal circumstances of the participants themselves. They include the profile information of the participants, and their ability to access the video content adequately and demonstrate the skills they require to adapt to the method of carrying out the website tasks.

The overall analysis of the results strives to provide an objective look at 'what happened' and 'why' in regard to the attempts by participants to master the listening content. The answers to these questions may lead to important insight into how valuable authentic listening tasks are in terms of determining learner language proficiency as well as the factors that do appear to either greatly or mildly affect authentic listening task results.

Chapter 4

This chapter shows the hard data that was collected on how well the surveyed students could do the listening tasks and has attempted to identify the lexical/grammatical and non-lexical/grammatical factors that contributed most to erroneous responses. Of the 187 students that were surveyed, only 20% of their responses to questions based on authentic news clips were essentially correct. When one takes into account the partially-correct answers, which are scored at half the value of correct ones, then one can surmise that one third of the responses can be considered accurate. Approximately, half of all answers were either incorrect, incomprehensible or non-existent. The results were not affected by significant levels of kutosis or skewness. This seemingly poor result based on a fairly large sample provided plenty of 'error data' to sift through and categorize.

Analysis of this collected data shows that with regard to both websites that were utilized, there was no statistical difference in the number of instances in which learners had misunderstood listening content and those that just poorly expressed what they appeared to understand. When the category of Poorly Expressed Responses was broken down into more specific problem areas, the largest category concerned the misuse of vocabulary. The high level of omitted and poorly-constructed speech parts also reflected evidence of a lack of proper grammatical training on the part of the learners. A sizable sample of responses was evaluated by an independent rater who agreed with 70% of the categories allocated by the instructor.

When the ten most frequent lexical/grammatical errors are tabulated, it appears that a 30% proportion concerns the unsuitable use of nouns and verbs. In this case, the term 'unsuitable' refers to strictly a lexical problem in which learners use words that are not appropriate for the meaning they intend to express. Vocabulary usage ranges from terms that may be synonymous or relevant to the appropriate words (but not suitable for the context) to those that are completely irrelevant.

The next three categories of error making up approximately 20% of the total involve nouns, prepositions and verbs being omitted from learner responses that render sentences either ambiguous or difficult to comprehend. The remainder of the error categories show a lack of understanding of the use of common prepositions, confusion over how and when to construct the passive grammatical tense and even how to distinguish the use of the simple present and present continuous forms. Adjectives were problematic in terms of which ones to use in particular circumstances and even how to avoid constructing them as nouns.

In terms of participant responses that show misunderstanding of the gist of the video passages, it is difficult to speculate on the reasons why there were irrelevant answers without having a close examination of at least five video clips that induced the worst results and five that produced the best. On the basis of the transcripts, there appears to be some distinct patterns that can be found when assessing the differences between the video segments that induced the worst results and those that led to the best. The 'Worst' group presented participants with challenging vocabulary (especially idiomatic forms) that was directly involved with the answer to the question. In only one of the transcripts did complex lexical structures play a subordinate role to the need for participants to grasp the context of an oral passage in which the answer is more implicitly explained than in the case of others. The 'Best' group, on the other hand, displayed three transcripts in which participants benefited from questions that were perhaps not particularly challenging as only lists of things from the transcripts needed to be produced in unspecified quantities. In addition, with regard to the other two transcripts, the correct answer is simply written in the opening 'speaking' part with no need for the participants to wade through the challenging vocabulary that appears later on. Had the gist of the listening segments been more stringently applied concerning those segments in the 'Best' group, participant results would have undoubtedly declined.

The supplementary experiments provided further opportunity to assess the effect of a participant's knowledge of vocabulary. For the wordlist experiment, in which an experimental group was given a list of key words from the video to study while a control group watched the video unaided, the results showed no significant advantage to either. The experiment comparing the results of the examination of the lexical/grammatical errors concerned

with listening comprehension, written comments, and oral comments, showed how vocabulary problems occurred more often with the listening test. The overall impression one could get from this comparative study is that listening-for-gist exercises based on academic themes and news content are more effective in spotting lexical/grammatical weaknesses among learners in adapting to authentic English language content than if they are left with the freedom to compose their own ideas. The final supplementary test which compared the lexical/grammatical features of oral comments with those that are written comments demonstrates specific differences between them while reinforcing the general patterns found in listening comprehension ? the propensity of students to use unsuitable vocabulary, especially verbs, which appears to be their major obstacle to communication.

The analysis of non-lexical/grammatical factors that may have influenced success in carrying out the listening-for-gist tasks was based on the limited amount of information provided by the participants themselves. Statistical information was obtained from listening comprehension scores and participant perceptions of the tasks were also valuable. It appears from the analysis that potential factors such as the video speaker profiles (i.e. gender, nationality and age), speed in terms of words uttered per minute, speech format (i.e. monologue vs. dialogue), opportunity for participants to adapt to the website format, participant gender and possible technical obstructions did not significantly affect the results obtained through lexical/grammatical means.

However, questions that were indispensably linked to specific vocabulary instead of being holistically based in the listening passage often presented insurmountable challenges. One also must mention that the academic major of the participant seemed to be linked his or her English level to some extent. These factors need to be carefully considered when a general analysis is made of participants' ability to listen for the gist of authentic English news content.

Chapter 5 and the Conclusion

This chapter aims at showing how the results can contribute to an effective language syllabus for the participant profile featured in this dissertation. First of all, it must be acknowledged that this representative group of non-English majors at a Japanese university is a long way from being able to absorb and process authentic English language content from an assortment of British and American news broadcasts. Certainly, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) would view these results with pessimism as they clearly send the signal that such students are not even close to acquiring the English language proficiency needed to effectively participate in academically inclined discussions with native speakers of English.

It must be noted that the degree of success among the participants from both websites ranged from 80% of all their answers being correct to 0%. This particular finding indicates that despite the fact that the participants had passed written English entrance exams or received high recommendations stemming from their English skills upon entering university, they simply did not all show a basic standard of English ability when it came to listening to authentic English-speaking news broadcasts. Therefore, one can consider this series of listening tasks as a completely different starting point for analyzing Japanese learners' English abilities that do not reflect their previous educational experience.

The most important finding of the research is that participants who were asked to complete authentic listening tasks were lacking sufficient knowledge of how to absorb and utilize key lexical forms. This deficiency indicates both a lack of emphasis and depth in the meaning and use of especially verbs and nouns in language learning. Participants may not be familiar enough with vocabulary to either understand it when it is naturally spoken in conversation or else use it effectively in describing what they hear. Therefore, a suitable syllabus for the participant profile of this research requires a deepening of the learner's knowledge of lexis, even at the expense of the extensive practice of complex grammatical targets.

This approach is in no way meant to undercut the need to deal with difficulties learners have to face with grammar as the research shows significant problems from that perspective as well. However, the ability of students to complete the tasks successfully would have been greatly enhanced if they had concentrated on building their vocabulary skills without the potentially obstructive burden of focusing attention on the wide range of grammatical forms. Mastering complex structures such as the appropriate use of the past perfect or past modals at a high degree of proficiency can be achieved later when learners are able to confidently distinguish the most common forms such as the simple present and past tense that effectively incorporate lexis and are essential for basic communication.

The question therefore arises as to how to incorporate vocabulary and reinforce basic grammatical structures into a syllabus that would maximize support for the participants featured in this research. More specifically, a teaching methodology needs to be planned in order to not only help these learners to understand the gist of an authentic oral passage with adequate familiarity of lexical/grammatical structures, but also help them to clearly express what they understand of the passage's gist.

Advice for initiating an English language syllabus for the profiled students would be to carry out the following procedures:

*Choose appropriate video segments that take into account such features as level of lexical/grammatical difficulty and the lack of overdependence on potentially unfamiliar lexis.

*Practice this lexis both orally and in writing with students before and after the video tasks in ways that allow them to see how it is used in sentences and within context.

*Require learners to respond to questions in full sentences as opposed to having them given options to choose in order to indicate whether response errors are due to poor expression or misunderstanding.

*Consciously use target words or grammar randomly throughout the lesson so that forms are reinforced implicitly and within context.

In summary, the use of an interactive, video-enhanced and accessible website that provides English-language learners with a convenient means of inputting and outputting data is a good way to ascertain their success or failure in deciphering authentic communicative English. The website format is most appropriate because a) it allows learners to prepare oral tasks independently and at their own pace through technological access, b) it enhances the need to move students toward approaching oral tasks holistically so that they can train themselves to listen for meaningful content and ignore irrelevance, c) it helps learners to face authentic and up-to-date listening situations as opposed to those dated and contrived monologues and dialogues that are often found in textbook examples, d) it promotes oral skills that many Japanese students have little opportunity to develop with sufficient feedback, and e) it provides instructors with quality data on what learners can do in English and how they can be supported.

論 文 審 査 結 果 の 要 旨

　第2言語の習得に聴解の学習はとくに重要であり、教授者には、学習者の能力を的確に測定・評価する方法を確立して、聴解力が他の言語能力と調和して向上するための適切な教材を開発することが求められる。本論文は、著者独自の方法を用いて、日本人大学生のもつ聴解および文産出を中心とする英語の運用能力の実態を分析し、問題点を明らかにするとともに、効果的な教材と教授プログラムの開発の指針を提供しようとするもので、全編6章から成る。

　第1章は序論であり、問題の所在について、日本における外国語教育の歴史に踏み込んだ議論を展開している。

　第2章では、先行研究を批判的に検討しながら、コミュニカティブ・アプローチの観点から、聴解教材に未編集の視聴覚資料を用いることの意義を論じている。

　第3章では、聴解能力の測定・評価の方法として、一般に語学力判定試験で用いられている正解択一方式ではなく、ウェブサイトに直結した未編集資料を用いて、学習者に骨子を文章でコンピュータ上に記述させて、理解度を複数の評価者が測定する方法を新たに提案している。さらに、ボイスメールを利用した自由口述作業を通して、学習者の語彙・文法能力を評価するシステムを提起している。これは、学習者の言語運用力を総合的に判定するうえで、注目に値する試みである。

　第4章は、本論文の中心部分であり、学習者による作業データの分析をしている。学習者の全体的な成績、評価者間の評価差異、ウェブサイト間の教材の難易を広範な視点から考察した後に、学習者の記述・口述に見られる語彙・文法上の誤りを詳細に分析して、単なる内容理解ではなく、メッセージの伝達可能性から見て必要となる語彙・文法知識を整理している。また、学習者に事前提供される語彙リスト、画面上の字幕、音声再生速度、音声構成など、一般に聴解作業の成績に大きく関わりをもつと思われる要因を分析して、実際にはこれが骨子理解のうえで重大な影響を及ぼさないという観察をしている。これは、興味深い知見である。

　第5章は、前章における分析結果をふまえて、教材開発と教授プログラムを進めるうえで必要な観点をまとめている。

　第6章は、結論と今後の展望を述べている。

　以上要するに、本論文は、日本人大学生の聴解を中心とする外国語運用能力の実態を多角的に分析して、必要な語彙・文法の知識を明らかにするとともに、教材開発の上で有用な視点と指針を提供したもので、情報科学および第2言語習得と言語学の進展に寄与するところが少なくない。

　よって、本論文は、博士（情報科学）の学位論文として合格と認める。