How Far Can Shadowing Improve Listening Ability in English Classes?

リスニング力向上に及ぼすシャドウィングの効果について

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Abstract

Many researchers (e.g. Lambert (1992), Hamada (2009, 2012), Mochizuki (2010), Shiota (2012), Murphey (1995, 2001), describe shadowing as a training method for listening and speaking among interpreters; it was extended here to improve listening ability among students. Students of EFL learn English mainly in classrooms, not in authentic situations. Realizing that my Japanese university nursing students have in class rarely listened to and learned to understand authentic English in class (Matsumoto, 2012), I decided to practice shadowing for 30 minutes in each session. VELC (Visualizing English Language Competency) tests in April and July, 2013 measured improvement in students’ improvement in Cando level and listening ability. The results of the paired sample t-test confirm a difference at the 10% significance level between the means in April and in July.

Keywords: shadowing, listening skill, classroom, t-test, Cando-level

Introduction

Shadowing forms part of the training in listening and speaking for interpreters (Lambert, 1992); word-for-word repetition, parrot-style, of a message presented through headphones. Originally this was part of the basic training for simultaneous interpreters. Both listening and speaking skills are acquired skills, but, as Carroll (1970) says, individuals have different ways of acquiring cognitive information and different rates of their speed and facility in storing, retrieving, and manipulating items of information (cited in Lambert, p. 266). Carey (1971) argues that shadowing will have a facilitating effect on retention (cited in Lambert, p. 267). Murphey (2001) studied what happens when second language learners and native speakers of English shadow each other. He examined conversational shadowing between two English native speakers and two Japanese learners of English in mixed dyads. He found three things: 1) there is a variety of effective types of shadowing; 2) interactive conversational shadowing needs conversational adjustments; and 3) the learning advantages for non-native speakers when they shadow native speakers of English are not the same as the advantages when they are shadowed by native speakers of English.

The Japanese university nursing students whom I have been teaching have a difficult time when they speak and listen to English in my classes. This seems to result partly from having spent so long as listeners but not speakers in English classes (Matsumoto, 2012), because Japanese English teachers expect this of them. Another reason appears to be that the Japanese language is a prosodic timed-syllable language, not a stress-timed language as English is. The timed-syllable prosody may influence Japanese students when they try to speak and understand spoken English. Otake (2002) contends that language-specific rhythmic categories play an important role in the processing of spoken language (p. 297). Dupoux et al. demonstrate that Japanese listeners tend to insert a vowel in accordance with the moraic structure which their prelexical perceptual processing imposes (cited in Otake, 2002, p. 299). Therefore, I argue that learning English rhythms is crucial and hope that shadowing will help Japanese university students to improve not only their listening but also their speaking ability.

My students shadowed three simple rhythms: a two-beat rhythm, a four-beat rhythm with weak and strong stresses, speaking a sentence in one breath (abdominal breathing)
and the dialogues between nurse and patient in their textbook. The students took three shadowing tests without looking at a text and were recorded on IC recorders. I listened to these shadowing tests and counted how many words they could each say accurately, so that I could give them feedback on their scores. This may have motivated them to practice shadowing.

**Data Collection Method and Analysis**

30 out of the 85 students had never learned shadowing at all, 35 of them had learned it to some extent and 7 students to a great extent. The 2 remaining students had studied shadowing intensively before they enrolled at university.

Once there, the 85 nursing students met once a week from April to July in CALL and, to begin with, they practiced English rhythms by themselves in class as they followed the words from the text. The students could listen on campus, and practice shadowing by accessing PCs on which the materials had been downloaded. They could also copy the content in their memory disks. After they had been practicing by themselves for about six weeks in classes, I divided them into groups of 3 or 4. For the third shadowing test, each group had a leader who was good at shadowing and could teach other members who found shadowing or pronunciation harder. I monitored them and gave advice where needed. They were given three shadowing tests during the spring semester, supplemented by VELC pre- and post t-tests and these all measured their listening ability.

**Results of the VELC tests**

I administered a Visualizing English Language Competency Test (VELC test) because it told students what level they could reach out of 10. I used a t-test (Paired Sample t-test). Table 1 shows the output in terms of statistics, correlations and results. Tables 1 (a), 1 (b) and 1 (c) show that, since $t = -1.965$, the $p$-value is .053. $T$ shows no difference between the mean confidence level in April and in July in the confidence level ($\alpha = 5\%$), but there is a difference in the 10% significance level.

Here are the results for the paired sample correlations and differences between the mean confidence level in April and in July.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair 1 April &amp; July</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>85</td>
<td>.712</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 (b)

**Results for Paired Differences**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1 April - July</td>
<td>30.789</td>
<td>13.641</td>
<td>9.69</td>
<td>41.92</td>
<td>-1.965</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>.053</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now I turn to the Cando level of the test result.

**Results at the Cando level**

The VELC test gives 10 possible levels of listening ability and shows what level each student can reach. The results are as follows. The students did not much improve in such Cando skills as Understanding or imagining basic English words... without reference to any particular content; Understanding or imagining the practical or applied meanings of the English words without reference to any particular content; or Recognizing and identifying the words with weak stress such as articles, prepositions and auxiliary verbs. This tells us that these Japanese students are not good at recognizing and identifying words which receive weak stress, because their mother tongue is a prosodic timed-syllable language, not a stress-timed language as English is. This is one of the major differences between the two languages. Because English words with weak stress are articulated more quickly and quietly than other words in the flow of speech, it is difficult for Japanese students to recognize them. They need to learn English rhythms to avoid the disadvantageous effect on their learning of English. They are also not good at identifying the unstressed endings of words, partly because Japanese does not mark plural and verb endings as English does.

Other Cando areas in which they had not improved greatly were: Understanding words which are pronounced with liaison; and Understanding which words are simple subjects or modified long subjects, when they hear them.
Many of my nursing students improved in this skill. The result shows how well the shadowing activity had improved their listening ability at this level. Though none had had this skill before, the Cando level of 41% - 50% was reached this time by 24 students, who could interpret correctly parts of words which were articulated ambiguously.

Figure 1 shows the results for the Cando level in Comprehending or imagining the meanings of words which high school students are assumed to understand without reference to any particular content. This Cando level improved from 6 Japanese nursing university students at 41%, until it stood at 50% for 27 students.

Figure 2 shows the result for the Cando level in Recognizing nouns, verbs, adjectives and other parts of speech when they are clearly pronounced. For students who have low ability in English, the speed of spoken English sentences is crucial to understanding. The graph shows that the Cando level of 31% to 40%, which none had reached at first, was now attained by 25 students.

Figure 3 shows the result for the Cando level, Interpreting correctly the nouns, verbs, adjectives and other parts of words which are articulated ambiguously.

Figure 4 shows the result for the Cando level in Recognizing the differences between /l/ and /r/, /b/ and /v/, which in Japanese are not differentiated. This is the most difficult area of pronunciation for Japanese people. 32 of these students now had a level of 21% to 30%, and 10 of them had a level of 41% to 50%, whereas none of them had had any score before. If they had practiced shadowing more, they would have attained an even higher level.
skills more and done so more quickly, because rhythmic categories such as morae in Japanese or stress units in English play a role in the perception of spoken language. Children easily imitate many more kinds of sound than adults do, due to their being still at the appropriate stage of development to acquire languages (Lenneberg, 1967). Lenneberg argued that language acquisition must occur before the onset of puberty in order for language to develop fully (quoted in Brown, 1995, p. 77)\(^{10}\),

\[\ldots\] the incidence of language learning blocks rapidly increases after puberty. Also automatic acquisition from mere exposure to a given language seems to disappear after this age and foreign languages have to be taught and learned through a conscious and labored effort. Foreign accents cannot be overcome easily after puberty (Lenneberg, 1976, p. 176, cited in Brown, 1995, p. 80).

In 2011, the MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) implemented English teaching in elementary schools in response to the requests of industry, the Japanese people’s desire to speak English and its own awareness of the critical period for foreign language learning (Nishida, 2006, p. 83)\(^{11}\). If, as Lenneberg believed, this critical period ends at puberty, then learning a second language past the age of twelve becomes a more difficult task.

Cook (1995)\(^{12}\) argues that the age factor is an uncontroversial research variable extending from birth to death, while Bialystok (1997)\(^{13}\), and Abello-Contesse et al. (2006) find the following: 1) multiple critical periods (each based on a specific language component, such as age six for L2 phonology); 2) the same or more critical periods for language acquisition; 3) a sensitive yet not critical period, and 4) a gradual and continual decline from childhood to adulthood (cited in Abello-Contesse, 2009, p. 170)\(^{14}\). Therefore, implementing shadowing in primary schools would appear to improve listening skills more quickly than the same activity later.

**Conclusion**

As the result of the Paired Sample \(t\)-test showed that there is a difference at the 10% significance level, it seems difficult to improve listening ability sufficiently in a single semester among students have got used to listening and not speaking in the classroom. Most nursing students are not good at English and, after 6 years of trying to learn it, they no longer enjoy it. An improvement in their listening ability also depends on how much they practice shadowing outside of the classrooms. If university nursing students had learned English – pronunciation and rhythms – at primary schools their listening and speaking ability would have improved more and at greater speed. If children are exposed to authentic English in their early years in particular during the critical period, they can improve their listening ability more easily than they will as university students. Children readily imitate without much difficulty the ways of pronouncing and the rhythms that they hear. Therefore, I would like to see shadowing implemented in the curriculum at primary school.

**Quotations**

9) Cutler, A. and Otake, T. Rhythmic categories in


**References**

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要約

シャドウィングは通訳者養成のために使われる手段の1つであることは多くの先行研究で明らかである。この手段が語学習に適応されている。被験者達は生の英語に触れる機会が少ない中で英語学習をしてきたので、講義内で30分間のシャドウィングを使ってリスニング力とスピーキング力がどの程度向上するかを調査研究した。VELCテストを4月と7月の2回実施し、効果をみた。t検定を用いた結果、10%で有意差があった。

キーワード：シャドウィング、リスニングスキル、講義室、t検定、Cando レベル