

中学校英語におけるリスニング指導の工夫

— 英語の音声の特色に気付かせる授業づくり —

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リスニング能力を向上させるためには、まとまった英語が話される時に生じる音声の特色を意識した学習が有効であると考えた。予備調査の結果を分析し、そのデータをもとに教材開発を試み、英語の音声の特色を意識した指導の有効性を検証した。また得られた成果から、リスニング指導の留意点についても考察した。

Introduction

Recently, globalization and the information technology revolution have advanced rapidly. In such a situation, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) emphasizes that it is essential for children to acquire communication abilities in English as an international language.

The course of study for lower secondary school established the overall objective of studying foreign languages as developing students' basic practical communication abilities such as listening and speaking.

In my class, however, I often see students who cannot respond appropriately or have a long conversation when they speak with ALTs. One of the reasons is that they cannot catch what native speakers say. When I reflected on my English class, I realized that I had not thoroughly covered listening skills, particularly characteristics of English sounds such as stress, sound changes and intonation.

In this paper, I will investigate how to improve students' listening abilities through developing new materials and examining the teaching of listening.

Contents of Research

1 About the Research Theme

1.1 Characteristics of Teachers' Talk

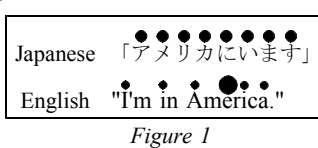
Brown & Yule (1983) point out the difference between the teacher and native speakers and claim that teachers speak slowly and 'artificially' clearly and generally address the class in a public style. They also point out that this may lead to the loss of normal habits of simplification which characterize the accent.

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1.2 Characteristics of English Sounds

a. Sentence Stress and Rhythm

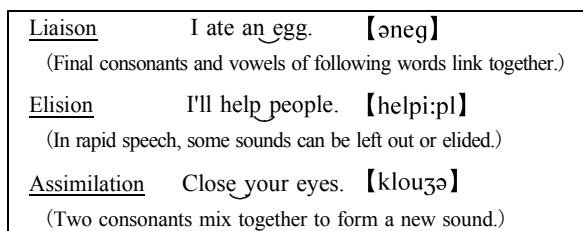
English sentences consist of 'content words' and 'function words.' Content words



usually mean something and are generally stressed while function words carry the grammatical meaning and are generally unstressed (Figure 1).

b. Sound Changes

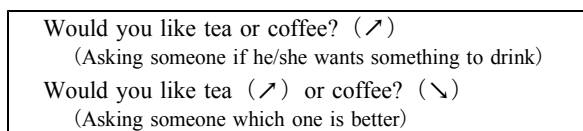
In English, sounds change when two words are connected. This kind of change can be categorized into many types, but I cover the following three types (Figure 2).



c. Intonation

Intonation is the system whereby the voice rises and falls in speech to help convey meaning. By recognizing it, listeners can understand what intention or emotions the speakers are expressing.

In this research, I cover some basic variations such as the ones which show differences in meaning caused by the rise or fall of the sentence ending (Figure 3).



2 Research Plan

2.1 Hypothesis

In this research, I have the following hypothesis.

Making students aware of the characteristics of English sounds helps them to grasp the point and leads to improvement in students' English listening abilities.

2.2 Procedure

This survey was conducted at Sagamigaoka JHS, targeting 77 ninth-grade students who are taking an elective English course. There are 4 phases in the procedure (Figure 4).

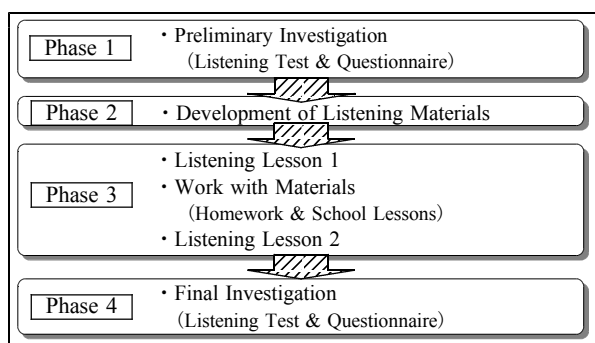


Figure 4

Phase 1 Preliminary Investigation

I gave the students a listening test and a questionnaire to understand their English listening abilities and attitudes towards listening.

In this questionnaire 76% of the total answered that they were "not good" or "not very good" at English. This indicates more than three fourth of students are not confident in English. I also asked the students why they felt listening to English was difficult.

Some factors why students feel listening to English is difficult

The spoken speed is too fast.	56
It's hard to understand without listening repeatedly.	54
It's hard to understand the whole content.	37
If there are any parts I can't catch, I can't go on.	34
I have a small vocabulary.	34
The words sound different even if I know them.	30
Other	32

(Mark all statements that apply : 71 responses)

Many of them answered "the spoken speed is too fast." However, it has been suggested that listeners have a tendency to feel a spoken foreign language is faster than their mother tongue (Osser et al. 1964). Takefuta, mentioning this, argues that spoken language contains not only physical speed itself, but something which makes listeners feel them to be fast (Takefuta 1989). Based on the answers to the questionnaire, I inferred two reasons:

The first is that students try to catch all the words without selecting content words and then they feel English is too fast to understand information.

The second is that students are not used to sound changes in English. As part of the listening test, they took a dictation test listening to spoken English with and

without sound changes such as liaison, elision and assimilation. When I compared the rates of their correct answers, they could catch English with sound changes only a third as well as English without.

Phase 2 Development of Listening Materials

In response, the following materials were developed: a booklet consisting of 10 sections, and a listening CD attached to it. Figure 5 shows the format of each section.

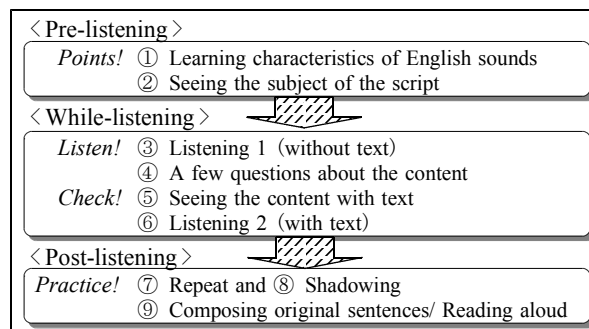


Figure 5

The materials are designed so that:

- Students can check phonetic points in each section.
- Students get several hints to imagine the contents described by pictures or diagrams.
- Students have two types of listening tasks:

One task aims at helping students notice sound changes such as liaison, elision and assimilation. They listen to the CDs several times and try to catch these words.

The other task aims at helping students notice the sound changes in sentences. They listen to the CDs and understand how connected words are pronounced with the help of symbols.

- Students read the text aloud so that they can speak while paying attention to the characteristics of English sounds.

In the text, only the words they have already learned are used except the ones which are inferable from context.

Phase 3 Listening Lessons and Listening Materials

a. Listening Lesson 1

<p><u>Objectives of this Period</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To find differences in sounds between Japanese and English and understand English has sentence stress and rhythm To learn how to listen and speak with attention to the characteristics of English sounds <p><u>Activities</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Warm up : Tongue Twisters Listen to English and notice the characteristics of sounds Listening Activities with attention to sentence stress <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pick up and write stressed words Infer the content by content words Read aloud with rhythm

I planned this lesson to make students *notice* the characteristics of English sounds.

In the listening activity, some of the students couldn't catch and write down the words. Even though many of them were able to write the words, some couldn't understand meaning of the text based on what they heard. We can assume that students might listen without thinking of the topic or they have not acquired the skill to catch stressed words yet. Based on these problems, I felt it necessary to teach listening comprehension in Listening Lesson 2.

b. Consideration of Students' Activities with Listening Materials

When the students finished all sections of the listening materials, I asked them to write their impressions based on the materials. I also asked which sections were easy and the reasons why. From their descriptions, the following tendencies could be seen:

- (a) Materials with short sentences seemed to be easier to listen to.
- (b) Materials about interesting topics or familiar situations seemed to be easier to listen to.
- (c) Materials with more familiar words seemed to be easier to listen to, and vice-versa.

c. Listening Lesson 2

I planned Listening Lesson 2 to focus on listening comprehension. The procedure was as follows.

<p><u>Objective of this Period</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To learn how to comprehend a brief passage by inferring unclear parts with content words <p><u>Activities</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> ① Warm up : Tongue Twisters ② Learn about characteristics of key words (content words) /Affirm how to comprehend the content using key words ③ Listening Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pick up key words and infer the content with key words • Check what students could infer • Read aloud with rhythm

First, I termed stressed (content) words 'key words,' and explained what kind of words they are and how they are spoken. I taught that key words make it easier to understand the content. Just before the listening activity, I gave students a hint related to the subject so that the students could listen with an image in their minds.

There were two aspects to the listening lessons:

(a) To Catch Key Words

Through two listening lessons, students learned to catch key words and to understand the content. Then they filled out reflection sheets. When I compared their answers for Listening Lessons 1 and 2, 77% of the students answered they could catch the key words better in Listening Lesson 2.

Next, I checked how they had written key words in Listening Lessons 1 and 2 by comparing the work sheets used in each lesson. They showed the following

tendencies. In Listening Lesson 1, because the students tried to catch all the words, they failed to catch information from the latter part of the passage. In Listening Lesson 2, on the other hand, students tried to distinguish content words from function words. *Figure 6* shows an example from a student's work sheet. This indicates that students came to catch the key words better.

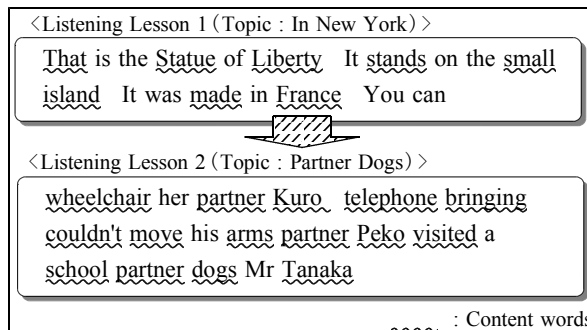


Figure 6 The words written on work sheets by a student

(b) To Understand Content

I asked the students how well they could understand the contents based on what they had heard. The students who answered they could understand the contents "very well" or "well" increased by 18% in Listening Lesson 2.

Next, I asked how well the students understood the content, and 14% of them had used inference to understand the story. According to them, when they came across unknown words, they inferred their meanings from familiar words. For example, the unknown word "wheelchair," could be guessed by the words, "couldn't walk."

Phase 4 Final Investigation

I examined the result of this investigation in the following two aspects.

a. Improvement in Listening Test

In the final investigation, the students took a listening test in the same way as the preliminary investigation. It included listening to English with sound changes, understanding meaning from intonation, answering questions about dialogues and choosing sentences where stress is put appropriately.

When I compared the results of these two tests, 75% of the students yielded better results in the final test, and 25% didn't change or had worse results. How I support these students has remained.

In these two tests, the most distinct change could be seen in listening to sound changes. In each test, students took a dictation test of eight examples of sound changes. Also 75% of students could catch more examples in the final test than the preliminary test.

b. Change in the Students' Attitudes to Listening

I asked students whether two listening lessons and

materials were useful to improve their listening abilities or not, and 32% of them answered "very useful," and 66% answered "useful." Students gave many reasons why they were so useful. Among them the following were popular ones: ① "I was not confident in listening to English first, but I feel it is easier to listen than before" (10%) and ② "The activities were good to me because I did not know how to learn (or "had no opportunities to learn") listening to English." (9%)

3 Outcome and Remaining Subjects

3.1 Outcome

a. The Students' Motivation for Learning English

In the final investigation questionnaire, some of the students wrote: "I want teachers to include these activities in the lessons" and "I would like to continue to do this kind of lesson." This indicated that students were now motivated to study listening, focusing on sound characteristics.

Besides, about 70% of the students answered they had more confidence to *speak* English with the sound characteristics than before.

My colleagues also recognized the change of students' attitudes. In their lessons students ask questions about sound changes or read sentences while paying attention to the rhythm or intonation.

b. Hints for Teaching Listening to English

(a) According to the reflection sheets after the lessons, about 90% of students answered that background knowledge before listening helped them.

(b) The spoken materials, with short sentences and based on interesting topics or familiar situations, seem easier to listen to and understand.

(c) The more familiar words are used in materials, the easier to hear they seem to be. Through this research, however, I realized the importance of nurturing students' inference abilities. Teachers need to stimulate students' inference abilities, for example, by putting some unknown words connected with the topic in materials intentionally.

(d) By questionnaire, I asked the students their impression of using the symbols that represent characteristics of English sounds in the text, and 93% of them answered that the symbols helped to identify characteristics. Besides, 41% of them answered that they began to use the symbols in English classes after my lessons. We can say therefore that using the symbols is effective to raise students' awareness towards sound changes.

(e) From an observation of students' activities and their comments on reflection sheets, I realized that Tongue Twisters lowered students' affective filters and made them

familiar with English rhythm and sound changes. Tongue Twisters are good exercises for students to become familiar with the characteristics of English sounds.

After the listening activities, 75% of the students yielded better results in the listening test than before. Besides, through a set of listening activities, most of the students answered that they felt those activities aided their English listening, and some of them answered that they felt it easier to listen to English than before.

In conclusion, it would appear that making students aware of the characteristics of English sounds can lead to improvement in students' English listening abilities.

3.2 Remaining Subjects

I have examined the teaching of listening with a focus on the ability to catch the characteristics of English sounds, as a basis of communication abilities. I feel it is necessary to continue the research and expand it to teaching students to be able to respond appropriately to others' questions or requests and to express themselves.

Conclusion

This research gave me some hints for teaching English listening. From next year, I would like to bring the outcome of this research into practical lessons and push for development of more effective teaching.

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