



Fluency through shadowing—What, why, and how?

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This article introduces shadowing and reviews research that has shown shadowing can have a positive effect on listening comprehension and oral reading fluency in foreign language classes. Following the introduction and research review, seven examples of classroom peer-shadowing activities are explained. Each explanation includes a visual representation of the student interaction and comments about the mental process involved in each. All the examples of classroom peer-shadowing use student-generated language as the source material rather than commercial native-speaker audio recordings as in the research experiments. The author-assigned labels for the seven examples are: full shadowing, slash shadowing, silent shadowing, part shadowing, part shadowing+comment, part shadowing+question, and “About you” shadowing. The author hopes that this article will enable teachers to use shadowing to give students practice in active listening and oral production of the target language.

本論文においては、シャドーイングについて定義し、さらに、「シャドーイングは外国語学習における聴解力と音読の流暢さ(ORF)に関して、明確な効果をもたらす」と提示している研究について考察する。序論および幾つかの研究に対する考察に引き続き、同一クラス内で実施される7タイプのシャドーイングについて解説する。いずれの解説も、各タイプにおける学習者の相互作用における視覚的描写と、思考経路に関する見解を提示している。同一クラス内で実施された、いずれのタイプのシャドーイングにおいても、様々な研究で使用されているような市販のネイティブ・スピーカーによる録音テープ・CDではなく、学習者自身によって考え出された文章を、シャドーイングする資料として用いている。著者が7タイプのシャドーイングのために設定したレベルは、サイレント・シャドーイング、フル・シャドーイング、スラッシュ・シャドーイング、パート・シャドーイング、パート・シャドーイング+コメント、パート・シャドーイング+クエスチョン、そして“About you”・シャドーイングである。著者はこの論文が、指導者が学習者に対し、目標と定めている言語の能動的なリスニングとオーラル・プロダクションの演習として、シャドーイングを活用していくことを容易にするものとする。

Funayama (cited in Mochizuki, 2006) defines shadowing as the practice of listening and at the same time repeating parrot-fashion each expression as immediately as possible. Tamai (2005) agrees that shadowing is “the act or task of listening in which the learner tracks the heard speech and repeats it as exactly as possible.” Funayama and Tamai make no specifications about the origin of the

language input unlike Mochizuki (2006), who specifically states the input is “native spoken language.”

Tateuchi explains that early research into shadowing was carried out in the field of psychology in the 60s (cited in Mochizuki, 2006). It was used to train interpreters and continues to be used for that purpose. Tanaka (2002) lists shadowing as one of 13 techniques used for interpreter training, stating that shadowing is effective in developing a “good ear” for language, specifically in regards to accent and intonation, as well as improving overall listening ability. Having been seen to be effective in improving the listening ability of interpreters, shadowing started to be used in the wider context of ELT in Japan. Using shadowing in ELT was a response to the need to improve students’ listening skills at a time when, in comparison to reading, writing, and speaking, listening methodology was underdeveloped (Tamai, 2005).

In research on improving Japanese students’ listening ability in English, Someya (1998) found both shadowing and dictation to be effective in improving comprehension. However he stopped short of any claims about comparative effectiveness, unlike Tamai (1992) who had stated shadowing was significantly more effective than dictation as a classroom activity for improving listening skills—with low or middle level as opposed to high level language learners showing the greatest improvement. Watanabe (2004) also found shadowing to have a positive effect on student listening comprehension. In addition to benefits to listening comprehension, improvements in learners’ prosodic elements after using shadowing have been reported (Yamane, Saito, & Yashima, 2004) as well as an increase in pitch range through using shadowing (Yamane, 2004).

Other studies support the claim that shadowing not only has a positive effect on listening and speaking but also on reading competence (Kadota & Tamai, 2004) and oral reading fluency (ORF) (Kinoshita, 2005). Kinoshita compared shadowing to traditional oral reading training and found shadowing to have the greater positive effect on students’ ORF. As well as a positive effect on reading fluency, Sakoda and Matsumi (cited in Mochizuki, 2006) found that shadowing, when applied to reading instruction, significantly accelerated learners’ accurate understanding of the text. Sakoda and Matsumi also found shadowing had a positive effect on the management of the mental lexicon with students demonstrating accelerated processing of vocabulary information. In addition learners of Japanese self-reported that shadowing as a class activity was an effective language learning activity (Mochizuki, 2006).

Shadowing and memory

In any classroom activity input first enters the students’ sensory memory. From here it will be immediately forgotten if not attended to (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968). Using shadowing ensures students pay attention to the oral input, therefore I call this process *attending*. Attending avoids the input simply going in one ear and out the other. By attending, the input passes from the sensory memory into the central executive area working memory (Baddeley, 1983, p. 165). (See Figure 1.) The working memory only seems to be able to retain about 1.5 seconds of information (Baddeley, Thomson, & Buchanen, 1975). Once in the working memory any auditory input will be forgotten within this short time if it is not rehearsed. Rehearsal takes place in an area of the

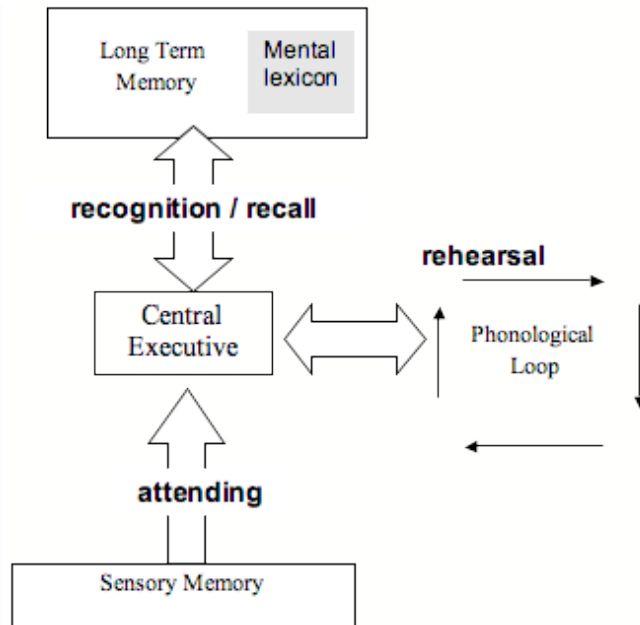


Figure 1. Memory

working memory Baddeley et al. call the phonological loop. Whilst it is being held and rehearsed in the phonological loop, the student has a chance to try to recognize the auditory input. In order to recognize the input, the student has to match up the input with previously stored information in an area of long-term memory called the mental lexicon (like a huge dictionary of all the words we know). Lachs, Goh, and Pison (1999) summarize research that demonstrates that information held in the mental lexicon can facilitate the

recall of verbal information in the working memory, which in turn allows students to recognize the language input. In my own language learning experience the more I practice recognition through the recall of previously learnt language items the easier subsequent recall becomes. This ability to recall language orally has led to smooth oral production of my second language.

Classroom peer-shadowing

Classroom peer-shadowing uses student-generated language as the source material rather than commercial native-speaker audio recordings as in the research experiments. Peer-shadowing in my classes and in my co-authored textbooks (e.g., Helgesen, Brown, & Wiltshier, 2007, p. 28) is preceded by schema activation through work on a theme-based language model and *think time* to allow students time to plan what they want to say. After these two stages the peer-shadowing takes place.

When using shadowing in large classes, I line up students in two parallel lines so each student is stood opposite a partner. After speaking and shadowing with this partner the lines are moved one or two places either way to provide new student pairings. The speaking / shadowing is repeated in this way usually three times with reducing time durations (e.g., 1st time = 120 seconds, 2nd time = 100 seconds, 3rd time = 90 seconds). Another way to set this up in the classroom is to sit students in concentric circles: inside circle speakers, outside circle shadowers. After each shadowing the outside circle rotates, providing a different partner with whom to repeat the activity.

Fluency is a fuzzy concept with a variety of definitions (Richards, 1990, p. 75). In order to improve fluency, students need large amounts of comprehensible input and to orally produce the language. Classroom peer-shadowing activities can provide easy to comprehend input and generate production of the target language. My students are advised to keep their spoken language simple (i - 1) so as to provide language that can be easily shadowed. The speaker, if support is needed, can provide the input by reading what they have previously been given time to prepare. From my classroom observations when peer-shadowing is set up correctly (preceded by schema activation and think time), it is done enthusiastically by students, very quickly generating a lot of oral production and active listening. In peer-shadowing there is a human element present that is missing when a tape recorder or CD is used to provide the input. Classmates smile and react to what is being said, computers and tape recorders do not. Using a variety of peer-shadowing activities allows me to keep classes fresh over the course of a term while maintaining the overall goal of active listening and oral production.

In order to achieve fluency in any foreign language a huge amount of time is needed (American Educational Research Association [AERA], 2006, p.3) together with appropriate practice. I believe peer-shadowing is one way to provide appropriate practice that is easy for teachers to implement in ELT classes in Japan and easy for students to feel successful doing. Generally students who feel successful are keen to continue. This is reflected in simple survey results about using shadowing in my university classes: 86% of students wished to continue using shadowing as they enjoyed it and

felt it provided them with a chance to successfully practice speaking English. But I do not wish to overstate the case for shadowing or any other activity that is designed to improve students' fluency. Very simply put, the improvement in an individual's fluency will invariably correlate to the amount of time the individual spends doing appropriate activities.

My introduction to shadowing was from presentations by Tim Murphey and consequently the design of my peer-shadowing activities was based largely on Murphey's work (Murphey, 2000, 2001). I started using shadowing in my classes as one way to focus students' attention on what was being said and to simultaneously stimulate oral production of the target language. All the peer-shadowing activities share this similar goal. However within this goal, each activity has a slightly different focus. Details of these differences are included under each diagram below.

Seven types of shadowing

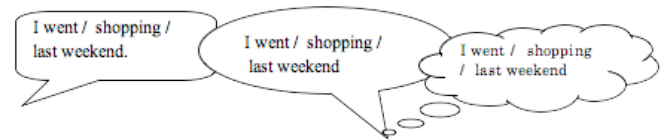
1. Full shadowing



In full shadowing the student listens to input then tries to repeat the auditory input as soon as it is heard. The speaker does not wait for the shadower to catch up. The shadower tries to repeat the input exactly as it was said. Full shadowing produces a lot of active listening and oral production in a short period of time, but is mentally hard for students. Shadowing native-recorded input is preceded by work on the meaning of the input (e.g., Kadota & Tamai, 2004; Koshima, 2007). Once the meaning is understood, full shadowing is practiced. This progression allows the shadower to practice copying the prosodic features of the input, that is, the sound, intonation, and stress patterns. In classroom peer-shadowing the meaning of the input can not be previously studied and is unknown. In my experience, shadowers try, with varying degrees of success, to both full shadow and understand the meaning at the same time.

However the biggest challenge to the shadower is to keep up with the pace of the speaker. The mental process in full shadowing is: attend " recognize (maybe) " produce. If the speaker's ability level is higher than the shadower's this can produce difficulties, and in such cases I would suggest using slash shadowing.

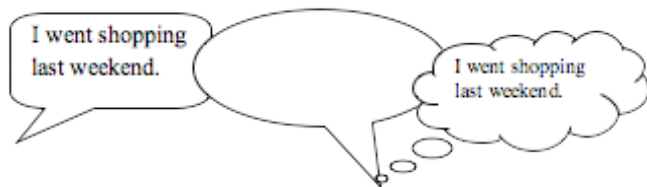
2. Slash shadowing



Slash shadowing is the label that I have applied to a shadowing technique I first saw demonstrated on video (Murphey, 2000). I introduced the term to distinguish this type of shadowing activity from others referred to in this article. In slash shadowing the speaker purposely delivers their speech with pauses between phrases. These pauses give the shadower more time to recognize the words in the input by matching them to words previously learnt and held in their own mental lexicon. Also the pauses allow more time for shadowers to pay attention to meaning. More pauses make shadowing easier. In mixed ability classes higher level students will be able to shadow with fewer pauses than lower level students. By having the speakers adjust the number and length of pauses, this type of shadowing can provide a way for even low level students to practice oral production. Slash shadowing is the activity I use most at my university. Students easily adjust the pauses to accommodate the level of their partner.

Mental process = attend → recognize → produce

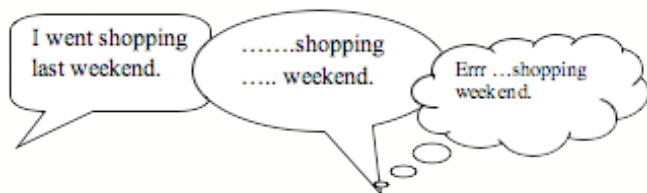
3. Silent shadowing



Silent shadowing, as the name suggests, is done in the head: sub-vocalization. Silent shadowing is a technique that can be used to shadow people without the speaker knowing. Students can use this outside of class wherever they hear the L2. If I use this activity in class it is usually for students to shadow me when I am reading aloud rather than as a peer-shadowing activity.

Mental process = attend → recognize → sub-vocalize

4. Part shadowing

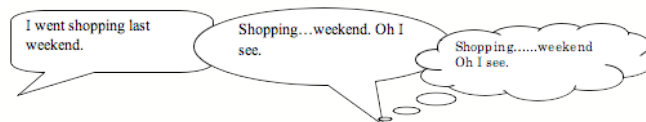


Part shadowing is also known as echoing (Murphey, 2000; Peters, 1997). In part shadowing the shadower picks up the last word or the stressed words in the input and just shadows these. The mental load when doing part shadowing

is much less than when full shadowing. I have used this activity to provide variation in what we do in the class. It is particularly useful if students are having difficulty doing full or slash shadowing because it is easier. Part shadowing naturally occurs in native speaker conversations and I make students aware that, used judiciously, it can help them make smoother English conversation both inside and outside of the classroom.

Mental process = attend → recognize (partly) → produce

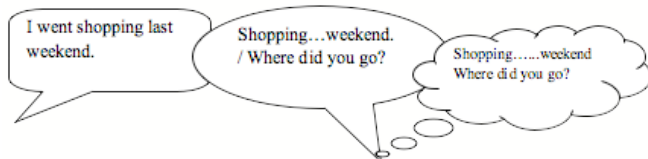
5. Part shadowing + comment



Similar to the above, but the shadower adds their own comment. In order to do this successfully the shadower must have previously learnt a variety of suitable comments and be able to recall these from their long-term memory. At my university I often elicit such comments from the students before the activity. If such comments are not known they need to be pre-taught.

Mental process = attend → recognize (partly) → recall → produce

6. Part shadowing + question



As above, but instead of a comment, a question is recalled from memory. In order to make an appropriate response the shadower will need to comprehend the input and have the ability to quickly formulate an appropriate question. This places a higher demand on the mental processing of the shadower. This type of shadowing is more appropriate for higher level students who can generate a question response quickly. In my experience this type of shadowing often fluctuates between shadowing and conversation because once a question is asked many students first want to respond to the question before continuing with the speaking/shadowing activity.

Mental process = attend → recognize (partly) → process → recall → produce

7. “About you” shadowing



“About you” shadowing requires the shadower to change the personal pronouns and possessives in the input. This type of shadowing is last because it includes a focus on grammatical accuracy. This creates the following mental process;

attend → recognize → process → recall → alter → produce.

Weaker students may find their fluency is adversely affected because they are focusing on correctly changing the grammatical structure of the sentence rather than smoothly repeating the input. The teacher needs to be aware of this and decide if this activity matches the aims and level of their particular class.

Conclusion

In this article I have defined and introduced seven varieties of shadowing that can be used in language classrooms. I have tried to highlight very simply the mental processes involved in each shadowing activity to enable teachers to understand the different focus and mental demands that each activity places on students.

My definition of shadowing from a teacher’s perspective is: a language practice technique which involves active bottom-up listening whereby the shadower borrows someone else’s language in order to practice oral production. This definition is broad enough to include both peer-shadowing and shadowing of native-speaker audio input. Both these two types of shadowing are similar, but do contain significant differences. It should be noted that the research in this article supports the claim that shadowing of native-speaker recorded input is effective in improving many aspects of language performance and, I believe to a certain extent,

can be used to justify the use of peer-shadowing in our classrooms; however further research, specifically into the effectiveness and benefits of shadowing peers, is needed to more strongly support such justification.

John Wiltshier has been a teacher for 17 years, 11 of which were in Japan. John has presented nationally and internationally in Europe and the US. He has been a guest presenter at Columbia University Tokyo, invited speaker on the ETJ Teacher Training Tour across Japan, and plenary speaker at PANSIG 2007. He is co-author of the new edition of *English Firsthand Access and Success* and currently works as an Associate Professor at Miyagi University. Contact email: <johnw@myu.ac.jp>.

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