



Examining extensive listening

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This article gives the results of an extensive listening (EL) study that was done using six university classes. We did pre- and post-listening tests plus two surveys (n=148). Our study class had an EL library of graded readers (GRs) with CDs. This listening class' activities included doing EL and shadowing. The others varied between (1) a speaking class having an EL library for listening homework, (2) a speaking class having a library of GRs for use outside of class, and (3) three listening classes which used a standard textbook. Problems with our listening test and our study's short time period prevent us from making statistically supported conclusions about the effectiveness of EL. However, we saw score increases that students attributed to doing EL and shadowing. A strong majority of students in our study class reported that doing EL and shadowing was useful, and that these activities improved their English.

本論文は大学で6クラスを使い多聴(EL)研究を行った結果について書いたものである。研究のはじめと終わりにリスニングテストとアンケートを2回実施した(148名対象)。研究対象の1クラスにはCD付きのグレーデッド・リーダーズ(GR)のEL用ライブラリーを用意した。このリスニングクラスはこれで多聴やシャドーイングを行った。他のクラスは様々で、(1)リスニングの宿題としてEL用ライブラリーを提供されたスピーキングクラスが一つ(2)授業外のアクティビティとしてGRのライブラリーを提供されたスピーキングクラスが一つ(3)標準的な教科書だけを使った三つのリスニングクラス、などに分かれる。リスニングテスト自体の妥当性の問題と研究が短期間であることでELの効果について統計的に立証できる結論を引き出すことができないが、何人かの学生は点数が伸びた理由としてELとシャドーイングをあげている。また、研究対象クラスの大多数が多聴とシャドーイングを役に立つと考え自分たちの英語力を伸ばすと答えている。

Most teachers would agree that one way of strengthening language learners' listening skills is to spend time listening. Extensive listening (EL) is similar to extensive reading (ER). ER consists of reading a lot of books in the target language that are easy for the reader to understand. Similarly, EL means spending extended periods of time listening to materials in the target language that learners can easily comprehend. If students are lower-level listeners, they should start with very easy texts. One source of EL materials is graded readers (GRs) with CDs. Some publishers even have books with CDs that are limited to 75 headwords.

The question for many teachers is: How can I successfully implement EL in my classes? As a first step, it is relatively easy for teachers to create an audio library if they have the budget and time. Teachers can then encourage students to choose some CDs and spend a lot of time listening. However, this is usually not enough for successful EL. Poor and average students will generally not expend the extra energy needed to go to a library. Further, having an audio library in the classroom does not necessarily create a successful listener just as providing an ER library does not always automatically create a successful reader. The teacher's role is crucial for the success of both ER and EL.

One way teachers can help students get the greatest benefit from the time they spend doing EL is to teach them active listening techniques. Two effective techniques are overlapping and shadowing. Overlapping is reading aloud using the text or script while listening. Skillful listeners will be able to read the words at the same speed as the speaker. Shadowing is reproducing phrases right after listening to a chunk of meaningful English without looking at the text. Thus, the listener follows the speaker on the CD like a shadow or an echo. Wiltshier's 2006 article provides a good literature review and information about shadowing.

Shadowing

According to Ken Tamai (2005b, p. i) the practice of shadowing was introduced in Japan in 1970 as a method of training interpreters for the Osaka World Exposition. He became interested in studying the effects of shadowing after he took interpreter training and learned the shadowing technique. He saw his TOEFL score jump by 50 points

within three months after years of being unable to move above the 580 mark. Tamai conducted a number of experiments on shadowing which he wrote up as part of his doctoral thesis. He later revised this thesis and published it as a book.

Tamai's experiments used native English materials rather than graded readers with their controlled grammar and vocabulary. He used the ETS's SLEP® (Educational Testing Service's Secondary Level English Proficiency Test) for his pre- and post-listening tests, and as a measure of his students' listening skill levels (p. 37-39). ETS developed the SLEP for use with "nonnative English-speaking students in grades 7-12" in the USA (Wilson, 1993).

Tamai's research showed that shadowing produces positive effects over a three-month period, especially for middle and lower-level students. Higher level students showed less improvement, probably because of their familiarity with the language (p. 44-45). His research showed that shadowing improves listening ability; however shadowing skills are not equal to listening abilities (p. 36). The reason is some listeners may be able to accurately reproduce phrases and sentences without understanding what they are saying due to their aural memory and reproduction skills.

Additional examples of shadowing exercises can be found in Tamai's (2005a) *The definitive edition of English shadowing* and Torikai's (2003) *Shadowing for the first time*.

Our study's context

We conducted our study at Tokai University where most departments require students to take at least four English

Communication courses. These courses are *Speaking and Writing* (with native English speaking teachers) and *Listening and Reading* (with Japanese teachers). Students start with *Speaking and Listening* in their first year and study *Reading and Writing* in their second year. Freshmen take a TOEFL-like reading and listening test which enables students to be placed in different levels for these required classes. These classes meet twice a week for 90 minutes. Each year, classes are divided into three levels: Advanced (about 300 students), Intermediate (about 3,400 students), and Basic (about 1,200 students). On average, classes have between 25 and 36 students. Our first semester classes begin in mid-April and go through mid-July.

At Tokai University, we have been successful with our ER program which started in 2003, so we decided to start an EL project. Our main questions were: How can providing an audio class library help improve our students' listening abilities? What teaching methods will facilitate this process? This is our first report on a study of classes with extensive listening libraries and how such materials can be used in class. We then compare our treatment group with other classes using other resources and methods.

EL goals

In doing EL, students would start by listening to graded readers CDs with controlled grammar and a restricted vocabulary. The goal is that they understand 97% of what they hear without needing to replay the material. If students understand the text, then they can enjoy listening. As they do so, they will feel successful. Once students experience this success, they will be more inclined to invest time to

becoming independent listeners of the target language. For many, this will enable them to subsequently become independent learners in the other language skill areas.

Our EL hypothesis

How can teachers guide students into doing EL in the classroom? Unlike ER, EL is a component of English education in Japan which has not received much emphasis. One reason is that until quite recently easy listening materials were not readily available. Another reason is a failure to highlight EL in the English curriculum. Also, it is difficult to formulate EL lessons for the classroom. Generally, EL is not an area that language teachers can teach since it requires students to take the initiative.

Still, there are ways of leading students into an independent involvement in EL through in-classroom listening activities. One way of implementing EL in the classroom is as follows. First, students do 10 to 30 minutes of EL in class. Providing time for EL in class is required (even if it is just a short time) because students will experience the advantages of doing EL. This will encourage their commitment to doing EL. Secondly, students should practice active listening using activities such as overlapping, repeating, and shadowing with the GR text they chose. Finally, as a class the teacher should help them practice some difficult consonants and sound changes using words in the context of a sentence.

We believe that these three activities will lead to students' positive commitment to increasing their listening skills. It will also increase students' conversational ability because

they will more easily comprehend another speaker's English. Given enough EL, students should also see higher listening test scores.

Our treatment and control groups

For our EL study, we used four advanced listening classes and two advanced speaking classes. The goal of the listening classes was improve listening skills, while the Speaking classes focused more on speaking skills. All listening classes used the required textbook, *Impact Listening 3* (Pearson Longman). Both speaking classes used required textbooks. Class B used *English Upgrade 3* (Macmillan), while Class C used a different book.

The classes and their use of EL are summarized below.

1. Class A (Listening) had a class library of graded readers with CDs and did 30 minutes of EL in class and used active listening activities.
2. Class B (Speaking) had a class library of graded readers with CDs which were available for listening as homework. No EL activities were done in class.
3. Class C (Speaking) had a class library of graded readers without CDs.
4. Classes D, E, and F (Listening) had neither graded readers nor CDs. They are our control group where teachers only use a listening textbook and focused mainly on textbook materials.

All students had access to Tokai University's main library which has a collection of graded readers both with and without CDs.

Our EL study class (Class A)

Class A was our treatment class, using EL in the classroom. Students could choose from an in-class library of graded readers with CDs and listened using battery-powered CD players with headphones. The class also had a required textbook. Lessons in Class A were structured around four main ideas and methods as described below.

First, the teacher created an English atmosphere. Krashen and Terrell (1983/2000) recommend that teachers use the target language in class (p. 20). We believe that it is important for students to listen to English and get used to hearing its sounds in class as much as possible. For many students, this is their only chance to hear English in person. The class was taught in English, even though the teacher was not a native English speaking teacher. Once class was in an English mode, students would more readily speak and respond to the teacher in English.

Second, 10 minutes were used to have fun with English sounds. Even though this is a college level class, a fun learning element should be included. Oral rhythmic practice using Jazz chants and songs were included in each lesson. Through these activities, the students learned the importance of English rhythm and intonation in listening in addition to confirming differences with Japanese sound system. When some teachers teach listening, they spend more time teaching how to listen for exact English sounds. However, this class focused on the rhythm and intonation while it taught only a few of the difficult consonants such as: [r] and [l]; [θ] and [ð]; [f] and [h]; [s] and [ʃ].

Third, after instructing students on active listening techniques, 30 minutes was used for independent-learning. Students chose and listened to a graded reader, and then they did some active listening activities. For the first 15 minutes, they usually listened to the CD while reading the book. Then, for another 15 minutes, they were encouraged to do overlapping and shadowing using the same book. While they practiced, the teacher walked around the class, listening to each student and checking to see if his or her reading could be understood. After the middle of the semester, students went to the back of the classroom and did shadowing without looking at the book while the teacher listened and checked what the student was saying against the book. This one-on-one instruction in and the teacher's evaluation of shadowing was crucial to the students' investment in the activity. It was also enabled the teacher to notice and give feedback on each student's strengths and weaknesses in listening and their use of the English sound system.

At the end of each class, students took their books home for additional practice and to enjoy the audio stories. Students were required to read and listen to 10 books. They were also encouraged to use the GRs with CDs in the university library. They were not given strict rules, but told to choose their favorite way of enjoying the audio books. The teacher suggested that they first finish reading their book, and then do shadowing. Since listening to an entire book might not be realistic in terms of time limitations, our students were encouraged to practice shadowing using their favorite part of the book.

Fourth, the final part of each class was 50 minutes for structured lessons from the textbook. Listening classes tend to

become passive if the lessons concentrate only on listening, and students will often to come to class without doing any preparation. If students have a passive attitude, then they remain far from developing the habit of independent learning that we want to encourage. Besides the textbook's various listening activities such as getting the main idea, the teacher routinely used two additional activities.

In the first activity, students did repeating and shadowing in pairs and groups while going through the textbook lessons. This was done after they understood the dialogs, new words, and idioms.

In the second activity, students were told to check the new English vocabulary in each unit using an English-English dictionary as homework before each lesson. Using an English-English dictionary was a new experience for most students. They were required to understand the meaning of new words in English, and write the meanings and an example in their notebook. In order to truly learn a new word, it is important to write both the meaning and how the word is used in a sentence. During class, selected students wrote their words, definitions, and examples on the blackboard. The purpose of this activity was to activate their commitment to learning English in English as well as avoiding falling into a monotonous listening mode.

Our other classes

Classes B and C were speaking classes. Class B had the same in-class graded reader library with CDs as Class A. During class, students were given time to select their books and talk about them in groups, but all listening to the GR

CDs was done outside of class. Students in Class B were required to read at least 8 GRs. Listening to the GR CDs was encouraged, but not required.

Class C had an in-class library of graded readers without CDs. Students were encouraged, but not required to read the GRs. In addition to textbook-related activities, students were required to make three presentations on topics selected by the teacher. Students in the audience were required to listen and rate the presentations of their classmates.

Classes D, E, and F were listening classes. They are our control group and had neither graded readers nor GR CDs. Teachers used the required listening textbook and focused mainly on textbook materials.

Pre- and post-listening tests

At the beginning of May, we conducted a pre-listening test and a survey in Japanese of our six classes. During the last part of June or the first part of July, a post-listening test and a second survey in Japanese was given. For some classes, there were only six weeks between the pre- and post-listening tests. Students who did not complete both tests were removed from our reports on the test data.

The results of our student questionnaires

Our study's students

All of these students were first semester freshmen. Although the classes in our study are labeled “advanced”, most students in these classes are not really advanced. Our study's six advanced classes had no students with our most advanced

English skills from departments such as the Department of Medicine and International Studies. The majority of students in our study classes had not yet taken a TOEIC or TOEFL test. Of the 148 students in our study's classes, only 13 students had taken the TOEIC test. Their median score was 450 and their scores varied from 370 to 630. Forty-two students had passed the Pre-2 Step Test (EIKEN). An additional 46 students had passed EIKEN 2. Although a few of our study's students would be classified as advanced most were truly intermediate students.

Most of our students' first language is Japanese. Four of our 148 students had a different first language. There were two Chinese, one Arabic, and one Indonesian speaking students. One of the “Chinese” students is bilingual in Chinese and Japanese. Of the 25 students in Class A who completed both surveys, 4 did not complete both tests. The charts made from our survey and test data are given as figures in the text below or in Appendix A.

According to our surveys, 61% of our study's students like English. (See Figure 1.) Students reported that they were generally poor at listening and speaking ($28+32=60\%$). They were also the most interested in ($23+43=66\%$) and wanted to improve ($28+37=65\%$) their listening and speaking skills. (See Figure 2 below.)

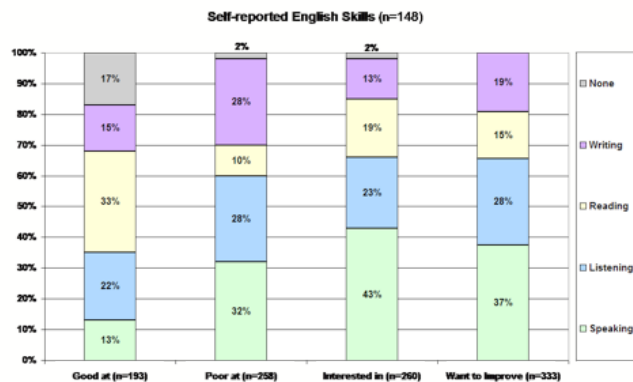


Figure 2.

Listening habits and attitudes

Prior to our study, more students liked listening in their first language (L1, 75%) than listening to English (57%). However, the majority (more than 70%) liked listening to English music. Fewer students (46%) liked listening to English videos, DVDs, or TV. 61% of students disagreed that listening to English had to be required, but 62% also said that listening was difficult. 72% disagreed that listening to English was a waste of time. Only 19% were comfortable guessing the meaning of a word they heard from context. 61% felt anxious when they were uncertain about words they heard. (See Figure 3 on the right.)

At the beginning of the semester, students spent more time listening for fun (45% spend more than 3 hours/week) and watching videos (60% spend more than 3 hours/week)

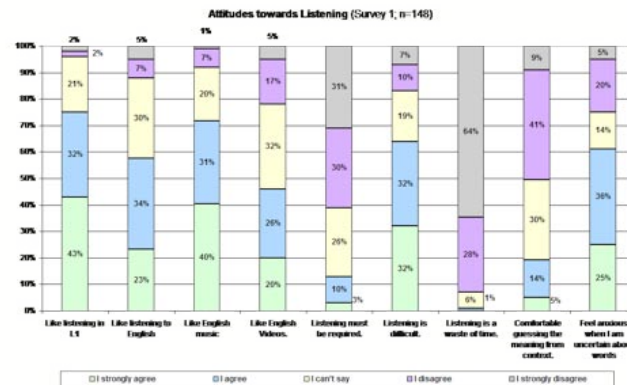


Figure 3.

in their L1 than in English. Only 38% spent more than 1.5 hours/week listening to English, and only 28% spent more than 1.5 hours/week watching to videos or TV in English. (See Figure 4.)

Listening to audio books

Prior to our study, only 38 of our 148 students had ever listened to an audio book. (See Figure 5.) In the audio book category, we included books recorded on CDs, and other mediums. 24 students had listened to audio books in their L1, while 28 had listened to audio books in English. Only 15 students had listened to more than one audio book in English. Only 3 students had spent more than 1.5 hours a week listening to English audio books.

44% students were uncertain about whether they wanted to listen to English audio books, but 40% were interested in doing so. 86% of students thought listening to English audio books would be useful. (See Figure 6 below.)

Favorite audio equipment

Students' favorite audio medium was CD players (47%) followed by MP3 players (28%) and MD players (14%). Only 12% of these students own cassette players. (See Figure 7.)

GRs read and listened to

During junior or senior high school, only 44 (or 30%) of our 148 students had read a graded reader. Only 22 (15%) had read more than 2. (See Figure 8.)

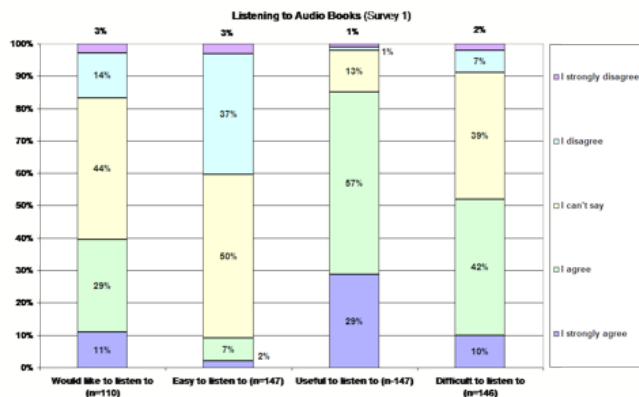


Figure 6.

At the end of our study, 20 students had listened to 8-10 GR CDs, while 14 listened to more than 11. Figure 9 shows how many graded readers students read and listened to. One student in Class F read more than 30 GRs.

Of the 50 students who listened to graded reader CDs, during an average week, 37% listened for 16-30 minutes, 24% listened between 31-60 minutes, and 14% listened for more than 60 minutes. (See Figure 10.)

Students' favorite way of listening to GR CDs was to "listen while reading" followed by "reading and then listening". (See Figure 11 below.) This concurs with the results of Brown's study (2007) where 58% of his students also preferred to "listen while reading" versus reading only or listening only (p.17).

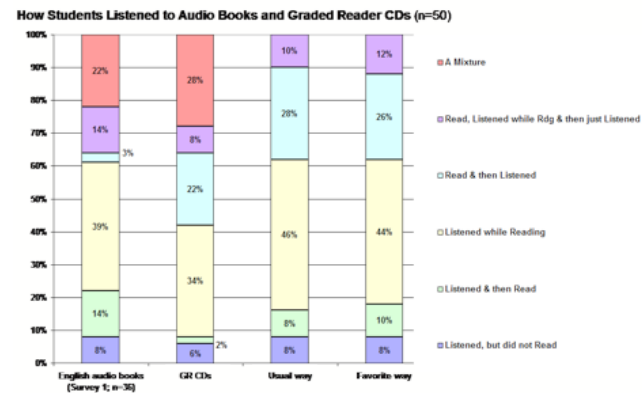


Figure 11.

A strong majority of students found listening to GR CDs useful, and those who used shadowing thought it was beneficial. As shown in Figure 12 (below), 45% of students thought GR CDs were easy to listen to, while 39% were undecided. 88% thought listening to GR CDs was useful, while 18% thought it was a bother. 49% thought it was fun. 79% thought listening to GR CDs helped improve their English. Of the students who used shadowing, 85% thought it increased their English skills.

Students generally felt that their listening skills improved. Figure 13 (below) shows the change in self-reported English abilities between our first and second surveys. Students who reported having advanced (6% to 5%) or upper intermediate (18% to 19%) listening skills remained about the same. The number of students who reported having intermediate level skills increased from 32% to 41%, while the lower

intermediate (28% to 26%) and low (16% to 9%) skill levels reported decreases.

Figures 14, 15, and 16 compare students in Class A (shown as [A] in the column labels) with students in other classes who listened to GR CDs. Figure 14 (below) shows students' evaluation of their listening skills at the beginning of our study (S1=survey 1) and at the end (S2=survey 2).

Because they were required to read and listen to 10 GRs, students in Class A listened to many more GR CDs than students in the other classes. 52% of students in Class A listened to more than 11 GR CDs, versus only 4% in the other classes. 32% of students in Class A listened for more than 46 minutes a week, versus 12% in the other classes. (See Figure 15.) Students in Class A also had more positive attitudes towards listening to GR CDs in all categories. These categories included seeing listening to GR CDs as

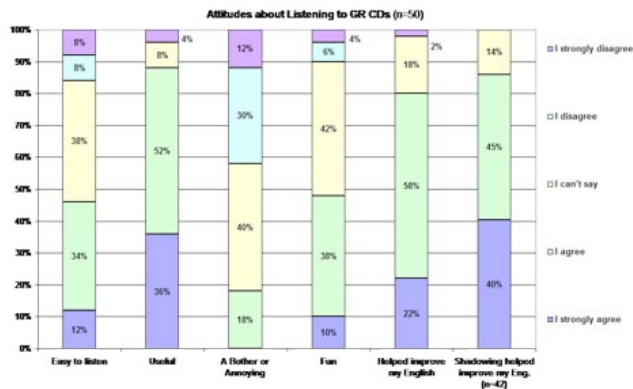


Figure 12.

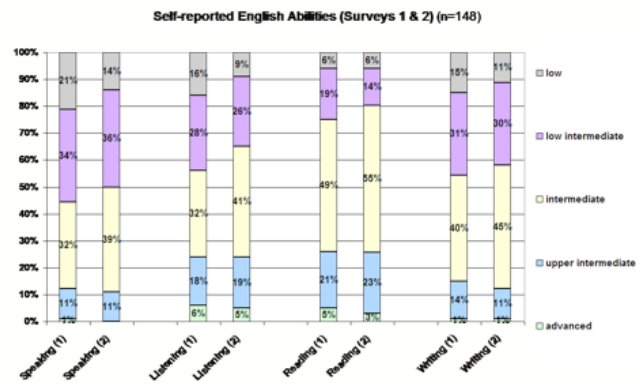


Figure 13.

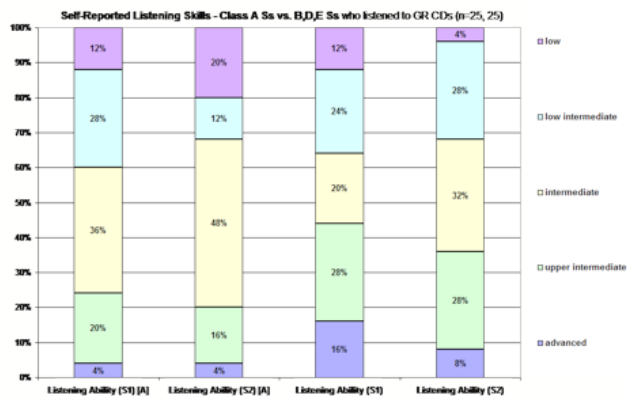


Figure 14.

easy, useful, not a bother (or annoying), fun, that it helped improve their English, and that shadowing while listening helped improve their English. (See Figure 16 on the right.)

Our listening test and the results

The listening test that we used was taken from 3 levels of a listening textbook series from a well-known publisher. Part 1 of our test was taken from the lowest level, Parts 2-4 from the middle level, and Part 5 from the highest level. There were ten questions in each part for a total of 50 points.

As shown in Figures 17 (on the right) and 18, students were able to correctly answer some questions at all levels, while some questions from the middle level were hard for almost all students. If the listening test that we used was an appropriate measure of students' listening skills, then more

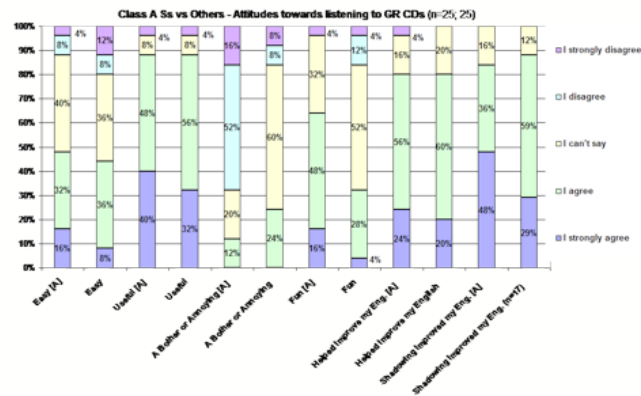


Figure 16.

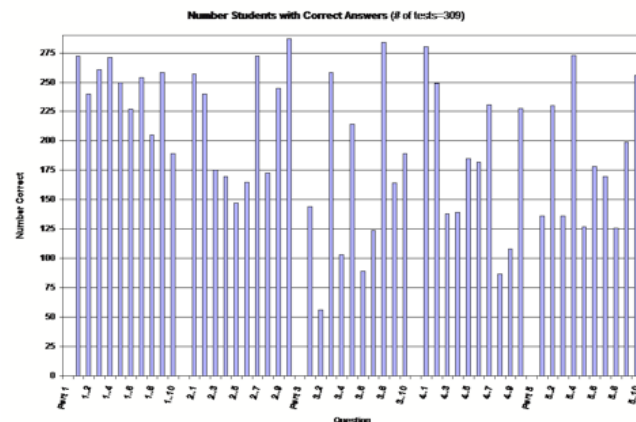


Figure 17.

students should have gotten correct answers on the “easier” part of the test (Part 1) than on the “harder” part of the test (Part 5). This was not the case. The easiest three questions were in Parts 2, 3, and 4; while the hardest three questions were in Parts 3 and 4.

Although there was not a good match between our listening test and the listening skills developed by GR CDs, student test scores did change between the two tests. Figure 19 shows the change in scores based on students’ second test scores. For Figure 20, each class was divided into thirds by their sorted-change in test scores. When possible, these changes were matched between classes. Some students in each class had their scores go down on the second test (a total of 25%), while others had no change in score (8%). Most students (67%) increased their score.

Figure 21 shows the average change in scores for the lower 30.5%, the middle 39% and the higher 30.5% of students in each class based on students’ second test score. Students with higher scores in each class improved more than students who started with lower scores. Students in the lower 30.5% on average lost points. They changed by -4 to +1 points. Students in the middle range gained on average between 1 and 4 points. Students in the higher range gained on average between 5 and 10 points.

Figure 22 (on the right) shows the average high, average, median, and low change in scores for the lower 30.5%, the middle 39% and the higher 30.5% of students in each class based on students’ second test score. Lower scoring students lost an average of 4 to 8 points on the second test.

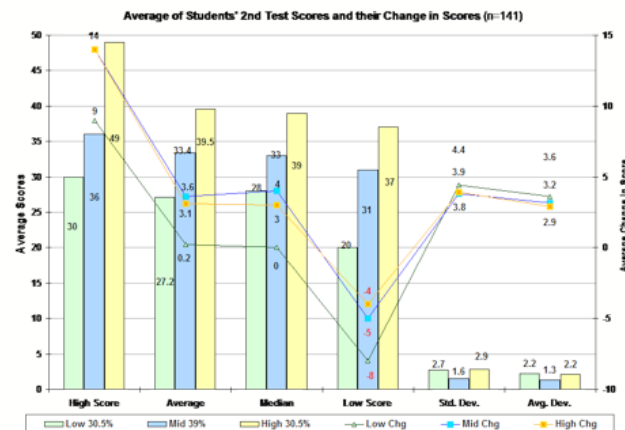


Figure 22.

The average change in test scores was 2.42, with a median of 3.0. The standard deviation of the changes between test scores was 4.26, with an average deviation of 3.44. Two standard deviations are approximately 8 points. Figure 23 (below) shows the second tests scores for students whose scores changed the most. On the left side are students who gained 8 or more than points on the second test (n=15). Their average score was 35. On the right side are students who lost 5 or more points (n=8). Their average score was 29.

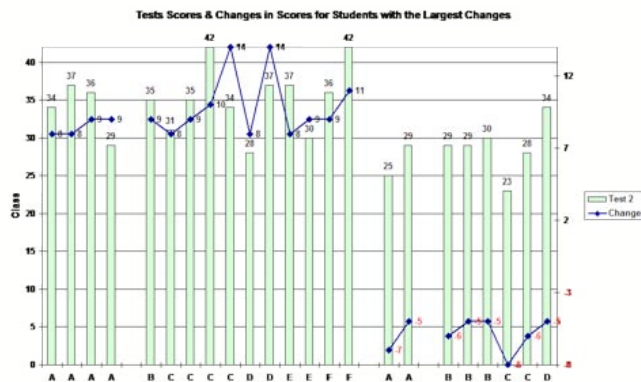


Figure 23.

Discussion: Students' explanations of their improvement

It is debatable whether an improvement of 8 or more points statistically correlates with an increase in students' listening skills. Still, Classes A and C had four students each, while the other classes had only one or two students in this group. Class A (our EL study class) had 4 (or 19%) of the 21 students who took both tests gain 8 or more points. Similarly, Class C (a non-EL class taught by a native English speaker) had 4 of its 19 students gain 8 or more points.

It was interesting that Class C had results similar to that of Class A. We cannot say exactly why this was so. One possible reason may be the time students spent listening to and evaluating their classmate's presentations. Possibly this listening time when combined with these students'

other English activities was enough for these four students. In particular, one the students mentioned below spent concentrated time talking with her native English speaking teachers.

We asked the 8 students from Classes A and C who gained 8 or more points in written Japanese to write (in Japanese) why they thought their score had increased by so many points.

One student had no reason, while five of the students (from both classes) mentioned being more familiar with the test and more relaxed because they were taking the same test a second time. Being familiar with the test enabled students to remember what they had heard the first time and to anticipate what might come next. Because students were relaxed, they were able to concentrate more on listening during the test.

Two students referred to the EL they did outside of class. A student from Class A said that his score improved because he watched TV dramas like *24* and *Prison Break* again and again. A student from Class C gained 14 points. She did EL during English conversations. She said she did better because she took lessons at a well-known conversation school, and used opportunities to talk with her native English speaking teachers three to four times a week.

Two students in Class A referred to the listening skills they had gained through extensive listening and doing shadowing. One of these students did EL both in and outside of class. She said, "I've developed the habit of listening to English carefully because we did a lot of the shadowing in class. Now, whenever I listen to Western music, I pay more attention to the words of the music."

Four of these eight students improved their listening skills by doing EL both in and outside of class. We can conclude that spending time doing EL improves students' listening skills.

Areas for Further Research

Further research on the effectiveness of extensive listening is needed over a longer period of time in order to draw statistically supported conclusions.

Since our study was not a long-term study, it is reasonable that we did not see greater reported changes in listening ability. Having self-reported skill improvement is also problematic for a number of reasons. Some students reported a decrease in their listening skills. In doing more listening, they might have gained a more realistic idea of their actual skill level, and so on.

The test we used had many idioms and used vocabulary and grammar that were more advanced than most of our students. We need a listening test that more accurately reflects the listening skills we expect to increase from listening to graded reader CDs. It should use a graded vocabulary and grammar that is similar to that found in graded readers. With such a listening test we will be able to more accurately measure our students' listening skill gains.

Conclusions

Despite problems with our listening test, we have several interesting and positive results. Our Class B had an in-class extensive listening library for the students to take home and listen to GR CDs. The results from these students' tests

seem to confirm that merely providing extensive listening materials is not enough to guarantee increased listening skills.

Our Class A provided 30 minutes of extensive listening during each class. Students in Class A spent longer times listening to GR CDs than students in other classes. They also had more positive attitudes towards listening to GR CDs and doing shadowing than students from other classes. Strong majorities found extensive listening both useful and believed it improved their English skills. Eighty-five percent thought shadowing while listening increased their English skills. Class A also had some of the larger score increases. Three of the four students in Class A who had the highest improvement on the second test attribute their success to extensive listening and the shadowing that they did in class and at home.

The results of using extensive listening in class appear to be very promising.

Miyuki Yonezawa is a Professor at Tokai University. Her academic interests include language acquisition, extensive reading and listening, American culture studies, race and ethnicity, and multiculturalism. She is one of the authors of the book, *Race and Nation: Ethnic Systems in the Modern World*, edited by Paul Spickard (Routledge, 2005). Her current research projects include multiculturalism in Japan, and extensive listening and its implementation in class. <miyukiyo@keyaki.cc.u-tokai.ac.jp>

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Appendix A

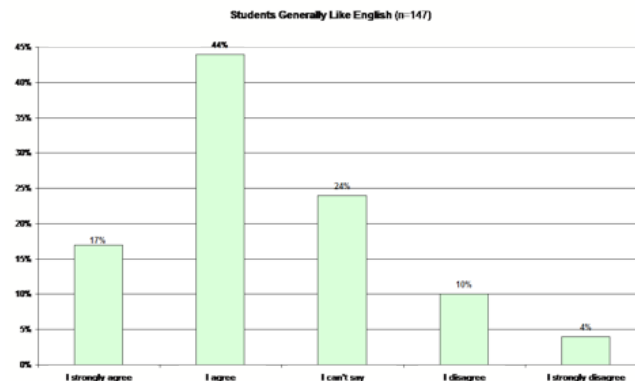


Figure 1.

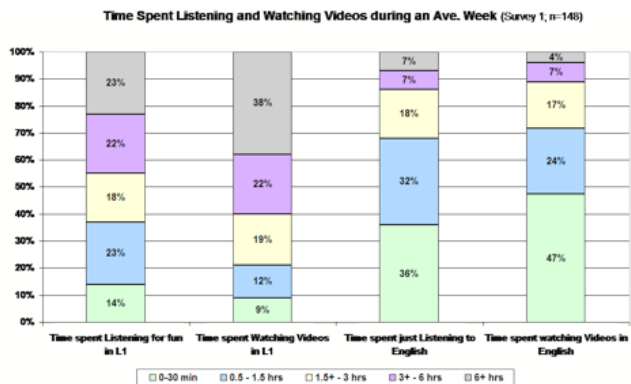


Figure 4.

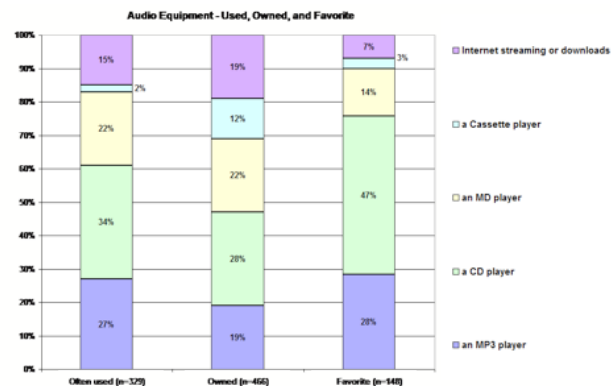


Figure 7.

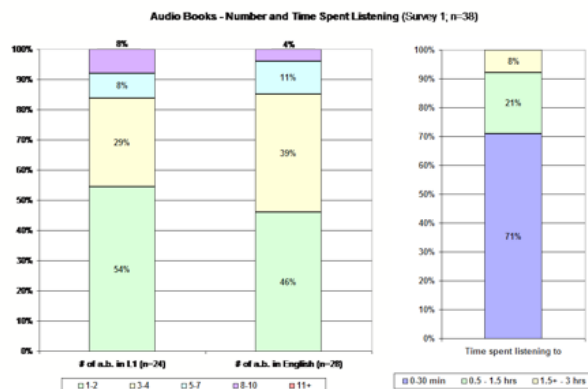


Figure 5.

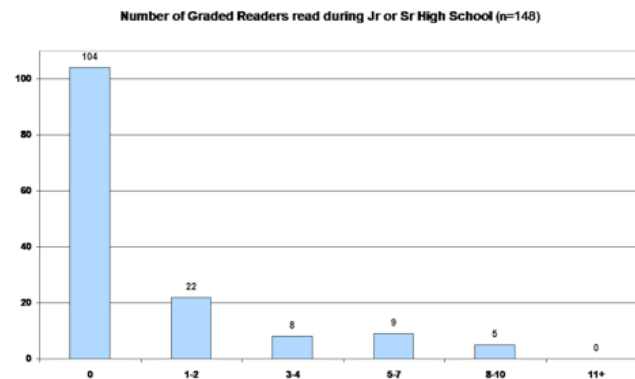


Figure 8.

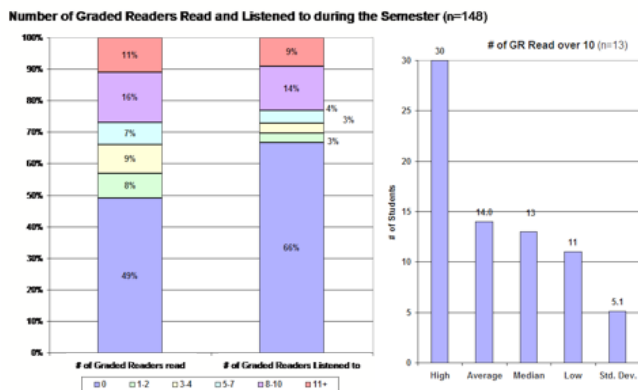


Figure 9.

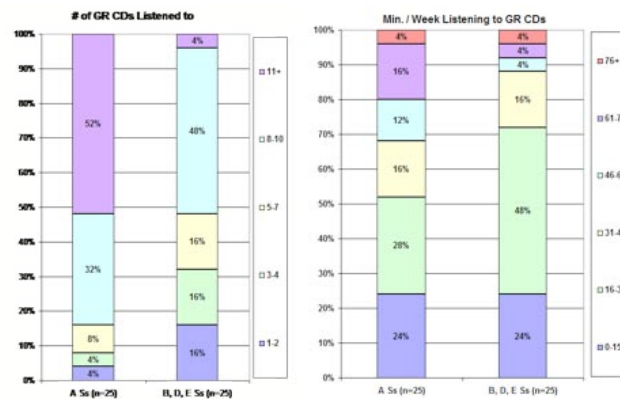


Figure 15.

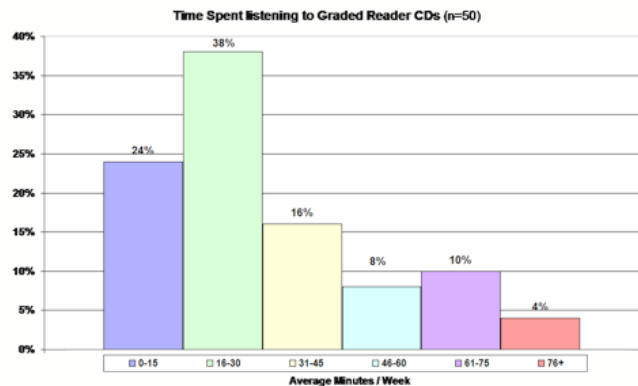


Figure 10.

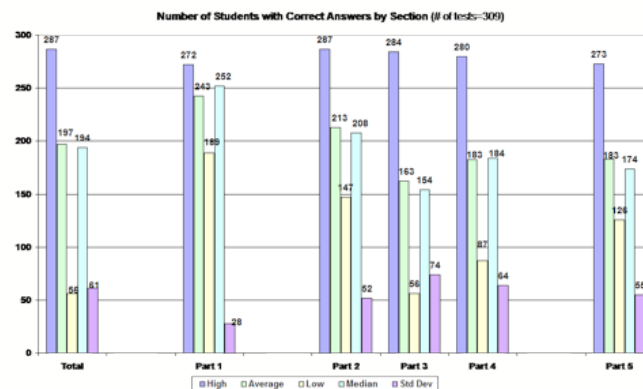


Figure 18.

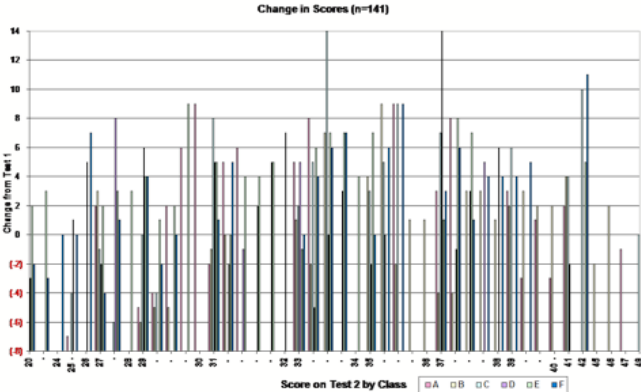


Figure 19.

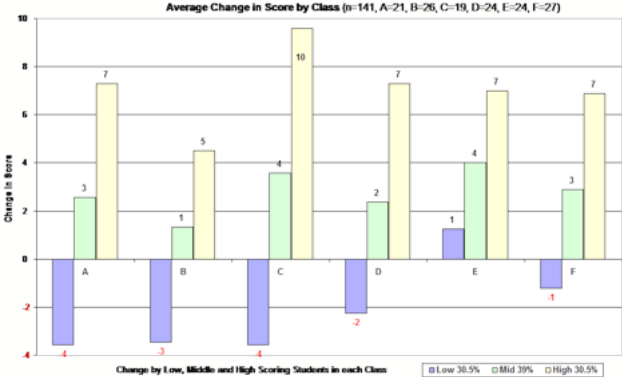


Figure 21.

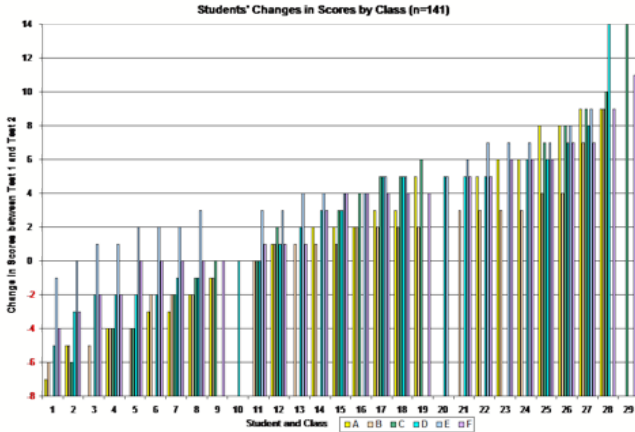


Figure 20.