Facilitating noticing through transcription

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If "what learners notice in input" is indeed "what becomes intake for learning" (Schmidt, 1990, as cited in Schmidt, 1995, p. 20), teachers need to develop activities that promote noticing of language form in the classroom. Transcription is especially suited to this purpose. Not only do learners notice as they transcribe, but comparing their transcriptions with others brings their attention to additional language features. This paper outlines an action-research project in which first-year university students individually transcribed audio and video clips in the classroom. Working at their own computers, students were able to pause and rewind clips as they transcribed. They then compared transcriptions with classmates and the teacher, noting differences and discussing salient language features. Lessons thus developed based on students' own discovery of language form and function. This paper discusses ways that transcription activities facilitated student noticing of language features.

　もし、実際は"what learners notice in input is what becomes intake for learning"（シュミト、1990）であれば、教育者は言語形式に気付かせるような授業方法を発展させる必要がある。複写はとりわけこの目的に適している。学生が、複写の際に気がつくだけでなく、他の学生と複写を比較することで更なる言語の特性に注意が向くのである。この論説は、大学一年生がオーディオとビデオの一部を個々に複写をしたアクションーリサーチプロジェクトを概説するものである。学生は各自のコンピューターで取り組むことにより、複写時の画像の一時停止や巻き戻しが可能であった。そして、自分の複写をクラスの仲間や教員と比較し、違いに注目し際立った言語の特性を話し合った。従って、授業は学生自らの言語形式と機能の発見に基づいて発展した。この論文は、複写が言語形式に気付くことを促進する方法について述べるものである。

The idea for this project developed in my second year of teaching Freshman English—a content- and task-based course (at a Japanese university) aimed at helping students develop their confidence and skills in speaking and listening. The majority of the lessons see students in small groups engaged in discussion activities on a range of topics—from Japanese culture to advertising techniques to relationship issues. This type of task-based education has been criticized, as Mennim (2003) points out, "for neglecting grammatical accuracy" (p. 131): "Neglect can be inferred if students are able to complete a task successfully by getting their meaning across in language that is inaccurate yet broadly intelligible" (p. 131). I had been increasingly concerned that, although they were getting lots of speaking practice, students were not getting opportunities to focus on language form. Like Mennim (2003), I decided to introduce some transcription

activities to promote a focus on form in class. I wanted to achieve a better balance between speaking activities and listening activities—which I felt were too few. I saw transcription as an opportunity for students to assess their own listening proficiency. I also wanted students to encounter new vocabulary and grammar forms through exposure to authentic texts. In an EFL context, exposure to authentic texts is especially important (Ciccone, 1995; Kitajima & Lyman-Hager, 1998; Whitlow, 2001; Young, 1993).

Theoretical framework

Noticing

Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis states that "what learners notice in input is what becomes intake for learning" (as cited in Schmidt, 1995, p. 20). There has been considerable debate over this hypothesis (see Schmidt 1995; Robinson, 1995; Truscott, 1998; Cross, 2002). Also, research supporting the hypothesis has yet to determine exactly what happens between noticing and learning, input and intake. Swain's (1995) Output Hypothesis included a claim that learners' own output has a "noticing/triggering function" (p. 474) which features in language acquisition. This process, in which learners make "comparisons between the current state of their developing linguistic system, as realized in their output, and the target language system, available as input" (p. 474), has been termed "noticing the gap" (Schmidt & Frota, 1986, as cited in Truscott, 1998, p. 2) and "cognitive comparison" (Thornbury, 1997, p. 326)—the latter in consideration of not only differences but also similarities between learners' output and the target system.

Learner-centeredness

There has been a shift recently towards learner-centeredness—not only in SLA research, but in teaching practice. In a classroom, the connections between what is taught and what is learned are indirect at best (Allwright, 1999; Roberts, 1995), and uptake is more likely when a student initiates a topic of discussion than when a teacher does (Roberts, 1995, citing Slimani, 1992). Thornbury (1997) criticizes the "presentation (accuracy-to-fluency) model of instruction" (p. 328) as it doesn't accommodate learners at different stages of skill and interlanguage development. Long and Robinson (1998) emphasize the importance, in language acquisition, of the "powerful internal syllabus" (p. 20) of each learner.

Transcription

Transcription has been studied by a variety of researchers in language education, many with an interest in noticing. Clennell (1999) suggested that transcription of interviews with native-speaker informants led to increased confidence and academic performance. Mennim (2003) found that learner transcription of their oral presentation rehearsals allowed them to make improvements in "pronunciation, grammar, and organization of content" (p. 130). Lynch's (2001) study found learner transcription of their own speech—combined with reflective self-correction, interactive peer correction, and supplementary teacher intervention—led to noticing of grammar points. Like Lynch's study, mine "deals with a communicative task in which there are no specific targeted items [where] the emphasis is on the learners doing the noticing for themselves, without the explicit direction of the teacher" (p. 125).

The study

Research question

In what ways did the transcription activity facilitate noticing of language form and/or language acquisition?

The task

The project I developed involved transcription of short audio and video clips in class. Each student was given the same clip. I chose clips that fit the content unit we were doing at the time. The transcription lessons followed a three-stage structure:

1. In the first stage, students were asked to individually transcribe the clip. Students worked at their own laptop computers and created transcripts using Microsoft Word. I asked students to leave underlined spaces in their transcripts for passages that they couldn't make out. When finished, students printed their transcriptions using the classroom printer.

2. In the second stage, students compared their transcriptions in groups of four. They were asked to go through and discuss any sections where their transcriptions differed and, after revisiting the clip, make any necessary corrections to their own transcriptions using black pen.

3. In the third stage, I projected my own transcription on the screen at the front of the classroom. Students were asked to compare their transcriptions to mine, and make any necessary corrections using red pen.

Data collection

I collected data in three phases:

Phase 1: mid-May, 2008

The first clip I chose for transcription was the video trailer for the movie *An Inconvenient Truth*, the Al Gore documentary on global warming. I chose it primarily because it fit the content we were engaged in at the time, a unit on the environment. The trailer contained 242 words in 123 seconds, for an average of 1.97 words per second.

After the transcription activity (described above), I gave students an open-ended questionnaire containing the following two questions:

1. How was the transcription activity?

2. Did it help your English learning? How? (Please give examples if possible.)

My questions were deliberately broad. I did not want to let students on to the fact that I was studying noticing. My logic follows that of Shanks and St. John (as cited in Robinson, 1995):

> If subjects have learned something other than rules, then asking them about rules may lead to erroneous conclusions. On the other hand, if we ask the subjects questions about what they did in fact learn, we may get reasonable answers. (p. 301)

Phase 2: mid-June, 2008

The second clip I chose for transcription was an Earth Day promotional spot discussing ecological footprints. Again, the clip fit because we were discussing ecological footprints in class at the time. The clip contained 103 words in 45 seconds (2.29 words per second). After the transcription activity, I administered the same questionnaire with a third, open-ended question added:

3.   Any other ideas or comments?

Phase 3: early October, 2008

The third phase of data collection took place after the summer vacation. I chose a Haagen Dazs radio commercial as the transcription activity for a unit on advertising. The clip contained 77 words in 31 seconds (2.48 words per second).

Looking across the three phases, there are a couple of things to note: the length of the clips we transcribed decreased while the words-per-second average increased; and each featured a different speaker speaking on a different subject.

Data analysis

I began my data analysis by reading through the questionnaires and noting the specific examples students gave of language features they noticed. Of the students who gave me permission to use their work in my research, only four students had given such examples. I decided then to focus on those four students in the rest of my data analysis. Looking back, I wonder if fatigue played a role in the

brevity of responses—I administered both questionnaires at the end of class following the transcription activities. Also, the questionnaires were administered in English. One JALT delegate commented that I may have gotten better, richer responses if I had given the questionnaire in Japanese. Indeed.

My participants were four Japanese, female, first-year university students. I refer to them hereafter as Participants A through D. I kept a list of all lexical items mentioned by my four participants. For each grammar point mentioned, I coded and counted their errors in all transcriptions. I then looked at each participant's numbers over the three phrases of the project.

According to my coding system, there were three ways to make an article error, for example: 1. To miss an article; 2. To transcribe the wrong article (e.g. "a" instead of "the"); and 3. To add an article when there was none.

Results
The activity led some students to notice new lexical items

Whenever a student mentioned a particular lexical item in a questionnaire response, I counted it as an instance of noticing. Here are two examples:

- "I could know new words. (ex.) live green = live sustainabilty / I'm all about~" (Participant D)

- "I could learn some idiom. ex when it comes to Maybe I think I never forget this idiom." (Participant B)

Of course it is quite likely that these students and others

noticed many lexical items during the transcription activity that they didn't mention in the questionnaire. In fact one might even argue that transcribing something correctly requires noticing it to some degree. The same could be said about corrections made by students during the second and third stages of the activity, when they compared transcriptions with group mates and the teacher—that making corrections and filling in words missing in their own transcriptions requires noticing them to some degree.

The activity led one student to experiment with new lexical items

I noticed Participant A experimenting with new vocabulary later in class. For example, a phrase from the *An Inconvenient Truth* trailer, "Hurricane Katrina slammed into New Orleans" cropped up in her presentation script: "and some disasters slammed into NY." While this usage is not necessarily natural, it points to the kind of experimentation with new lexis that figures in Swain's Output Hypothesis (2005), which claims that "output may sometimes be, from the learner's perspective, a 'trial run' reflecting their hypothesis of how to say (or write) their intent" (p. 476).

The activity led some students to notice language features other than lexis

My participants mentioned a range of language features in their questionnaire responses:

Participant A: Articles and prepositions

"It was very difficult for me. Especially, I couldn't understand easy words like "at, to, a, the", and proper noun. I was thinking Kilimanjaro was killed man job!!"

   Participant A also made an astute observation about what might be called reduced forms, assimilation, and/or linguistic inferencing: "There are the words which hardly was spoken. Why can people in English area understand?"

Participant B: Final "~s" sounds and articles

"I couldn't here "~s" "the" "a"..."

Participant C: "r" sounds and "th" sounds

"I can't hear native speaker's English to distinctive. For example, 'earth' and 'us'"

Participant D: Word linking

"I became to attention to words connection."

Errors generally increased with words per second

In general, the percentage of errors made by the participants increased with each transcription as the words-per-second ratio increased.

Participant A

Participant A's error average remained constant for articles, with 15 errors per 20 instances for Transcription 1 and 3 per

4 instances for Transcription 2. For prepositions, it increased from 57% to 83% for the same two transcriptions (see Appendix 1, Tables 1 and 2).

Participant B

Participant B's error rate increased sharply from 14% to 83% for final ~s sounds, but dropped slightly from 57% to 50% for articles across Transcriptions 2 and 3 (see Appendix 1, Tables 3 and 4).

Participant C

Participant C's error rate rose from 27% to 43% for "r" sounds and dropped slightly from 62% to 57% for "th" sounds across Transcriptions 2 and 3 (see Appendix 1, Tables 5 and 6).

Participant D

I calculated Participant D's errors in word linking by looking at mistakes that occurred at the beginning or ending of words that seemed to be influenced by adjacent words. For example, in Transcription 3, instead of "if everyone on the planet," Participant D transcribed "if everyone wanna plant." I counted this as one word-linking error. Because of the difficulty of counting the number of words that were actually linked in the clip, I calculated her error rate by dividing the number of word-linking errors by the total number of words in my transcription. Her rate increased steadily from .03% to .04% to .05% across the three transcriptions (see Appendix 1, Table 7).

While it may initially seem disheartening that participants' error rates increased from transcription to transcription, it is perhaps not surprising when we remember that the words-per-second ratios were increasing too. As the transcriptions got more difficult, students made more errors. Also, because of the non-uniformity of the clips themselves (speaker, pronunciation, genre, topic, frequency of lexical and grammar forms, etc.), it is difficult to make specific comparisons across transcriptions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I found that the transcription activity did facilitate noticing for some students. Students noticed new lexical items—and, in at least one case—subsequently experimented with them. Students also noticed other language features, from pronunciation patterns to grammar forms to linguistic processes. And although transcription errors generally increased with words per second (as dialogue sped up), it is possible that this decrease in accuracy is linked to experimentation with new language forms.

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Appendix 1

Transcription errors

Table 1. Participant A, articles

Transcription	WPS	Instances	Errors	Error %
1	1.97	20	15	75%
2	2.29	4	3	75%

Note: WPS=Words per second

Table 2. Participant A, prepositions

Transcription	WPS	Instances	Errors	%
1	1.97	21	12	57%
2	2.29	6	5	83%

Table 3. Participant B, final ~s's

Transcription	WPS	Instances	Errors	Error %
2	2.29	7	1	14%
3	2.48	6	5	83%

Table 4. Participant B, articles

Transcription	WPS	Instances	Errors	%
2	2.29	7	4	57%
3	2.48	6	3	50%

Table 5. Participant C, "r" sounds

Transcription	WPS	Instances	Errors	%
2	2.29	22	8	27%
3	2.48	17	6	43%

Table 6. Participant C, "th" sounds

Transcription	WPS	Instances	Errors	%
2	2.29	13	8	62%
3	2.48	14	8	57%

Table 7. Participant D, word linking

Transcription	WPS	Words	Errors	%
1	1.97	242	7	.03%
2	2.29	103	4	.04%
3	2.48	77	7	.05%