

Coverage and instruction of reduced forms in EFL course books

Keywords

coverage, EFL coursebooks, listening instruction, reduced forms

As the development of bottom-up skills in L2 listening instruction begins to gain greater attention, more and more EFL course books are beginning to include exercises that are designed to improve learners' abilities to understand reduced forms such as *gonna*, *wanna*, and *didja*. As a step towards understanding how forms such as these are being integrated into these materials, this study examined 13 EFL course books and analyzed the number and frequency of the forms they contain, as well as the types of exercises they include. The number and frequency data was then compared to 13 different books that are specifically designed to teach reduced forms, thus allowing for a determination of the extent of coverage course books are providing. Overall, the results provided a favorable picture of course books' handling of reduced forms. However, some recommendations are made for improving coverage and making instruction more effective.

L2リスニング指導においてボトムアップスキルの開発が注目されはじめる中、学習者の *gonna*, *wanna*, *didja* のような弱形に対する理解度を高めることを目的とした練習問題が含まれているEFL用テキストが増えている。弱形がこれらの教材にどのように導入されているかを明らかにするために、本研究では13冊のテキストを調査対象とし、それらの中に含まれている弱形の数および出現頻度、練習問題の種類を分析した。さらに、数と出現頻度のデータを、弱形を中心に取り上げる専門書の調査データと比較することによって、テキストでの収録範囲を確認した。分析の結果、テキストにおける弱形の取り扱い方は、概ね専門書の調査結果と一致し、良好であるということが分かった。しかし、収録範囲の細部や教育方針に関しては、改善の余地があると思われる。

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Researchers of second language (L2) listening echo a similar refrain about the place of their specialty in the wider field of English Language Teaching (ELT). Namely, that despite its importance for the linguistic development of learners, listening does not get the attention it deserves. Field (2008, p. 1) writes the skill has been, and continues to be, on the back burner, and states “there is still plenty of evidence that listening is undervalued.” Wilson (2008, p. 17) argues that of the four skills, “listening is probably the least understood, the least researched and, historically, the least valued.”

One consequence of listening having been somewhat neglected over the years is that the methods employed to teach it have not been subject to much critical review. Field (2003) argues that one shortcoming has been the lack of attention to the difficulties L2 learners face when confronted with connected speech containing assimilation, elision, and other forms of linguistic variation (hereafter referred to collectively as ‘reduced forms’). This can be attributed at least partly to the fact that listening instruction has tended to emphasize the development of top-down listening processes over bottom-up processes (Vandergrift, 2004). Increasingly, however, researchers are recognizing the importance of bottom-up skills for successful listening. This applies to reduced forms, as the publication five years ago of a book-length treatment (Brown & Kondo-Brown, 2006a) of teaching and researching these forms evidences. The authors of this book note that despite the importance of reduced forms for learners, little research on their instruction has been

conducted, and state that the goal of their book is to “kick-start interest” in the field so that more research is undertaken (Brown & Kondo-Brown, 2006b, p. 6).

As the teaching of reduced forms receives greater attention in the field, a growing number of ELT course books now include exercises that expose learners to these forms and give them a chance to practice them aurally and/or orally. However, due to the fact that even in the field of phonology, reduced forms have not been of central concern, and that few linguists have attempted to develop a systematic explanatory framework for them (Obendorfer, 1998), course book authors face a challenging task when it comes to deciding which forms to include in their materials. Additionally, because little research has been done to examine how best to teach reduced forms, they also face difficulties deciding what kind of exercises to include in their course books to teach the forms.

As a step towards understanding how reduced forms are making their way into the curriculum, the purpose of this paper is to examine the coverage and instruction of reduced forms in ELT course books. Course books will be analyzed to see which forms have been included, and the coverage they provide and will be compared to books that are specifically designed to teach reduced forms. The types of exercises they use to teach the forms will also be examined. The following research questions will be addressed:

1. How many forms for different types of reduction are included in the course books, and how does this compare with books on reduced forms?
2. Which individual forms are most frequently included in the course books, and how does this compare with books on reduced forms?
3. What types of exercises are included in the course books to help learners to improve their understanding of reduced forms?

Method

Materials

Thirteen course books and 13 books on reduced forms were included in the study:

- Course books: *Interchange Intro, 1, 2, 3, Active Listening 1, 2, 3* (Cambridge); *World English 1,*

2, 3 (Cengage); *Interactions Access, Interactions 1, 2* (McGraw Hill)

- Books on reduced forms: *Mimi Narashi Eigo Hearing 2-shuukan Shuuchuu Zemi, Eigo Hearing Tokkun-hon* (ALC Press); *Kiku Tame no Eigo Renshuu Note 1, 2* (Asahi Press); *Eigo wo Kikitoru Tame no Mimi-narashi Kuchi-narashi Listening Drill* (Asuka Publishing); *Eigo Listening no O-isha-san* (Japan Times); *Sound Advice, Whaddaya Say* (Longman); *Hit Parade Listening, Top of the Pops Listening* (Macmillan); *Listening wa Kou Manabe* (Nippon Jitsugyou Publishing); *Listen and Learn: Native no Oto ga Wakaru Eigo Listening, Eigo no Mimi ni Naru* (Sanshusha)

All of these course books are available in Japan and are all published by major American or British publishing companies, and the levels range from high-beginning to upper-intermediate. As for the books on reduced forms, four are published by major American or British publishing companies, while the remainder are published by Japanese publishers of textbooks and/or self-study books. It could be argued that a greater consistency could have been achieved by only including books published by American and British publishers. However, this is complicated by the fact that very few books devoted to teaching reduced forms are available from these publishers. For this reason, a mixture of US/UK and Japanese publishers was utilized in the study.

Procedures

In order to answer the first two research questions, a computerized database of all of the forms for five different types of reduction covered in the 26 books used in the study was created. The five types included were assimilation (e.g., *meet you* → *meechu*), elision (e.g., *them* → *'em*), flapping (e.g., *butter* → *budder*), fused forms (e.g., *going to* → *gonna*), and glottalization (e.g., *button* → *bu'on*). The database included the following information: 1. the form itself; 2. the name of the phonological process associated with the reduction in the form (e.g., assimilation, elision, etc.); 3. the actual word(s) used to illustrate the reduction (e.g., the words *meet you* being used to illustrate assimilation of /t/ and /j/ to /tʃ/); 4. the title of the book in which the

reduction was found; 5. the page number. After information about all of the forms was input into the database, analyses were performed in order to determine the number of distinct forms, as well as the frequency of appearance of each form. Comparisons were then made between the course books and the books on reduced forms with regard to both the number of forms covered and their frequency of appearance. For the purposes of this paper, the books on reduced forms will be considered collectively as a comprehensive list of the reduced forms for the five different types examined that are present in the English language. Although it cannot be said with certainty that they include every instance of these reductions in the language, they are more comprehensive than more academically oriented books in the fields of phonetics or phonology. Research question three was answered by simply making lists of the types of exercises included in the course books that are designed to provide instruction on reduced forms, and making comparisons between them.

Results

Number of forms

There were a total of 26 distinct reduced forms included in the 13 course books examined in the study. In contrast, the books on reduced forms included a total of 82 distinct forms. Accordingly, course books provided coverage of 31.7% of the forms included in the books on reduced forms, and for the purposes of this paper, concomitantly 31.7% of the forms for these types of reduction present in the language. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the number of forms included in both types of book for the five different types of reduction. It should be noted that "distinct form" refers to a specific instance of reduction that is phonologically different from others; accordingly, *them* being pronounced as *'em* and *him* being pronounced as *'im* would be considered two distinct types of elision. *Her* being pronounced as *'er*, however, would not be considered distinct from *him* à *'im* because it involves the same phonological process, i.e. the dropping of the /h/ sound.

Table 1. Number of forms for different types of reduction

Process	Distinct forms in course books (N)	Distinct forms in books on reduced forms (N)
assimilation	4	18
elision	14	51
flapping	0	2
fused forms	8	8
glottalization	0	3
	Total=26	Total=82

As the table indicates, discrepancies in coverage were found to exist depending on the type of form, with course books covering all of the fused forms, but none of the forms involving flapping or glottalization. With regard to assimilation and elision, the levels of coverage were 22% and 27% respectively.

Frequency of inclusion for individual forms

Due to space limitations, all of the forms found in the course books and books on reduced forms will not be provided here, but Tables 2 and 3 provide lists of the ten most frequent forms in both types of book and the number of books (out of a total of 13 for each type) that they appeared in.

Table 2. Top 10 forms included in course books

Form (citation → reduced)	Example	Process	Books (N)
/d/ + /j/ → /dʒ/	would <u>u</u> you	assimilation	7
/d/ → ∅	could → cou <u>l</u> d	elision	5
/t/ → ∅	can't → can <u>t</u>	elision	5
/h/ → ∅	he → <u>h</u> e	elision	5
going to → gonna	NA	fused form	5
want to → wanna	NA	fused form	5
have to → hafta	NA	fused form	5
/t/ + /j/ → /tʃ/	get <u>t</u> you	assimilation	4
and → 'n	and → an <u>d</u>	elision	4
/g/ → ∅	doing → do <u>ing</u>	elision	4

Table 3. Top 10 forms included in books on reduced forms

Form	Example	Process	Books (N)
/d/ + /j/ → /dʒ/	would <u>u</u> you	assimilation	12
/d/ → ∅	could → cou <u>l</u> ð	elision	12
/t/ → ∅	can't → can' <u>t</u>	elision	12
/t/ + /j/ → /tʃ/	get <u>u</u> you	assimilation	11
/h/ → ∅	he → h <u>e</u>	elision	10
/g/ → ∅	doing → doi <u>g</u>	elision	9
/k/ → ∅	talk → tal <u>k</u>	elision	9
going to → gonna	NA	fused form	9
got to → gotta	NA	fused form	9
want to → wanna	NA	fused form	9

As Tables 2 and 3 demonstrate, individual forms were more likely to appear consistently in books on reduced forms than in course books. In fact, only one form, specifically assimilation of /d/ and /j/ to /dʒ/, appeared in more than half of the 13 course books. In contrast, in the books for reduced forms, many forms were found in the majority of books. Although the books on reduced forms showed greater consistency in terms of which forms they included, it should also be noted that there is a substantial overlap with respect to the most frequently included forms in the two types of book. The top three forms in the Tables 2 and 3 are identical, and five other forms are found in both tables, although

not in the same rank order. This makes for a total of eight out of ten forms being found in both tables or an overlap of 80% with regard to the ten forms with the highest rates of inclusion. In order to investigate whether this overlap also applies to the remainder of the 26 forms included in the course books, the correlation between the frequency of inclusion for all of these forms and their respective frequency of inclusion for the books on reduced forms was calculated. A relatively strong correlation was found: $r(24)=.60$, $p<.001$.

Despite the relatively strong correlation with respect to the frequency of inclusion for different forms, there were several forms for which there were clear differences. A list of these forms is provided in Table 4, along with the number of books they appeared in (for both types of book).

As Table 4 shows, some forms that had relatively high levels of inclusion in the books on reduced forms had little to no inclusion in course books. The first four forms in the table were included in approximately a third to a half of the books on reduced forms, but were not included in any of the course books. The remaining forms had similar levels of inclusion in the books on reduced forms, but only limited inclusion in the course books.

Types of exercises

A total of eight different types of exercises that were devoted to reduced forms instruction were found in the course books. Table 5 lists these types and provides information about how commonly they were employed. In order to give

Table 4. Forms with large differences in coverage

Form	Example	Process	Coursebooks (N)	Books on reduced forms (N)
/t/ → /ɾ/	wa <u>t</u> er	flapping	0	7
/z/ + /j/ → /ʒ/	as <u>u</u> you	assimilation	0	6
/s/ → ∅	make <u>s</u>	elision	0	6
could have → coulda	NA	fused form	0	5
/s/ + /j/ → /ʃ/	make <u>u</u> you	assimilation	1	7
/l/ → ∅	feel → fee <u>l</u>	elision	1	7
/p/ → ∅	help → hel <u>p</u>	elision	1	7
has to → hasta	NA	fused form	1	7
/v/ → ∅	give → gi <u>v</u> e	elision	1	5
/ð/ → ∅	that's → th <u>at</u> 's	elision	2	7

a comprehensive picture of the frequency of the exercises, the table provides data not only for the number of textbooks that they were found in, but also shows the number of individual sections of these books (out of a total of 68 sections) that contained them.

Table 5. Exercises on reduced forms in course books

Type of exercise	In N sections (% of total)	In N books (% of total)
1. Listening to examples	68 (100%)	13 (100%)
2. Repeating and / or reading aloud examples	66 (97%)	13 (100%)
3. Listen and select between two reductions	13 (19%)	4 (31%)
4. Listen and select if citation or reduced form	12 (18%)	5 (39%)
5. Dictation	12 (18%)	2 (15%)
6. Mark forms that reduce in example sentences, then listen and check	4 (6%)	4 (31%)
7. Use reduced forms in conversation	4 (6%)	2 (15%)
8. Pair speaking: distinguish between citation and reduced forms while listening to partner	1 (1%)	1 (8%)

As Table 5 shows, listening to example sentences and repeating or reading them aloud were by far the most common exercises found in the course books. All 68 of the course book sections examined included having students listen to examples, and in only two cases were they not asked to practice saying the examples themselves. Accordingly, it can be said that the main way used to introduce reduced forms is to have students listen to example sentences and then say them themselves. In some cases, the course book sections only consist of this introduction to the forms, but in the majority of cases this is followed by different exercises that are designed to help reinforce instruction (exercise types 3 through 8 in Table 5). As the table shows,

the majority of these follow-up exercises involve listening. In several books, learners are asked to listen to sentences and determine which reduced form they contain, or whether the form(s) in the sentences are citation forms or reduced forms. A similar exercise has learners read sentences prior to listening and mark the words, which may be reduced. They then listen to check to see if reduction is actually present in the sentences. Dictation exercises were found in two course books. In these exercises, learners listen to sentences that contain reduced forms and write them out using their citation forms. Finally, a few exercises that involved speaking were found. Four of these simply directed students to engage in conversation and try to make use of the newly learned forms. Another exercise, only found in one book, has learners work in pairs taking turns reading sentences aloud and listening for whether the forms used are reduced or not.

Discussion

The course books examined in this study were found to cover approximately 32% of the forms that are included in books specifically designed to teach reduced forms. Considering that reduced forms instruction is still a small component of these course books, this can be considered a reasonably good percentage. Coverage was found to be particularly strong for fused forms such as *gonna* and *wanna*. On the other hand, forms involving flapping or glottalization received no coverage. This discrepancy may be due to the fact that fused forms are sometimes written in their reduced forms, and for this reason are more salient for textbook authors. Additionally, they are common in a number of different varieties of English, whereas flapping and glottalization are more common in some varieties than others (Shockey, 2003). Flapping, for example, is a prominent feature of American, Australian, and Irish English, but is less common in British English (Shockey, 2003). Despite this, these forms can create comprehension problems for learners, so providing some coverage would likely be beneficial.

Although course book authors only included a third of the forms found in books on reduced forms, they appear to have done a good job selecting which forms to include, as a rela-

tively strong correlation was found between the frequency of coverage for the forms included in course books with that of books on reduced forms. In other words, forms that were considered important by authors of books on reduced forms were also found to be important for course book authors. Nevertheless, two shortcomings were found. First, there was less consistency in the course books, with only one form being found in over half of the books examined. This suggests that a consensus about which forms are important to teach has yet to develop. Second, there were several forms that were included frequently in books on reduced forms, but were not included in course books. This includes flapping, discussed above, but also forms involving assimilation and elision that are very similar to forms that were frequently included in the course books. The fact that these forms were not included points to the main problem with reduced forms instruction in course books. Namely, that they tend to teach forms as isolated instances of reduction, rather than as the result of processes that can affect many different sounds. While there is probably not room in course books for detailed explanations of reduction processes, a simple explanation (e.g., that word-final consonants have a tendency to be reduced), followed by examples would give learners the tools they need to understand reduced speech when they encounter new instances on their own.

Finally, with regard to the types of exercises included in the course books, it was found that having students listen to example sentences that include reduced forms and then practice saying them aloud were by far the most common. A number of the course book sections that were examined also included follow-up exercises, and most of these involved further listening practice. Considering that for most students, the ability to understand reduced forms in real world encounters is likely to be more important than being able to produce the forms themselves, this is a welcome result. Nevertheless, only two out of the 13 course books included dictation exercises. Although there is still not much research on reduced forms instruction, most of the studies that have been undertaken have used dictation, and have found it to be effective. In perhaps the earliest study of its kind, Brown and Hilferty (1986) used dictation to teach reduced forms to Chinese

EFL students. Statistically significant gains of 32% were found between pre-test and post-test. In a similar study conducted with Japanese EFL students, gains of 30%, also statistically significant, were found (Crawford, 2006). Dictation was also found to be effective in two other studies (Crawford, 2005; Matsuzawa, 2006). However, the gains the learners achieved between pretest and posttest, at 15% and 12%, respectively, were not as large, although they were found to be statistically significant. The strength of dictation is that it simulates the cognitive processing that learners must engage in when they encounter reduced forms, namely to hear them and decode them into forms that they already know (i.e., the citation forms). While the other types of exercises that were found in the course books can provide valuable practice, they do not simulate this process as closely as dictation. For this reason, it is hoped that course book authors take note of the effectiveness of dictation and include more such exercises in their materials.

Conclusion


Considering that reduced forms can create significant comprehension problems for learners, it is encouraging to see that more and more authors of EFL course books are including them in their materials. Although this study revealed some shortcomings with respect to how reduced forms are taught in course books, such as a lack of consistency and a tendency to introduce forms as individual instances of change as opposed to the products of a limited number of phonological processes, overall the results were positive. The course books examined in the study covered close to a third of the forms introduced in books that are specifically designed to teach reduced forms, and there was a significant overlap in the forms included in the two types of books. With this good start behind them, let us hope that course book authors continue to see reduced forms as an important part of the curriculum, and that efforts are undertaken to make improvements in the selection of forms for inclusion and in the methodology employed to teach them.

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