Authentic Sound Bites: Using Talk Radio Clips for Language Acquisition

Mark Rebuck
Meijo University Faculty of Pharmacy

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Using 2 examples of recordings from talk radio, this paper outlines how authentic audio can be made accessible for learners and used in a way that promotes language acquisition rather than just tests listening comprehension. The characteristics of the described recordings are encapsulated in the acronym *SAMPLE* (Short, Authentic, Meaningful, Productive, Listening, Extract). Key components of this acronym are explained with the aim of providing some guiding principles for incorporating this audio resource into EFL lessons.

この論文では、ラジオのトーク番組から録音したふたつのサンプルを用いて、オーセンティックなラジオの音声が、いかにして学習者の手の届くものになり、そして単なるリスニングの理解テストとしてではなく、言語習得の助けとなるような方法で用いられうるかについて論じる。録音されたものはSAMPLEという頭字語でその性質を描写することができる（S：短く、A：生の英語で、M：意味のある、P：生産的で、L：聞きとりで、E：抜き出されたもの）。この頭字語の文字のいくつかについて解説し、オーディオクリップをEFLの授業に取り入れる際に留意すべき点について説明する。

WHILE DISPOSING of my few remaining cassette tapes some months ago, memories returned of listening-comprehension time in a Tokyo *eikaiwa* (conversation) school at the start of (what turned out to be) my career. I was aware even then (in the early 1990s) that listening skills were important, of equal importance with speaking skills, as had been pointed out to me by Anderson and Lynch (1988, p. 3). I was thus loath to omit the listening exercises in each unit of the textbook the school management had chosen for the class. Yet, although a lesson without listening was somehow incomplete, the feeling that lingered following the textbook listening exercises was itself one of incompleteness. This feeling, I later realized, arose because learners were just being tested, by means of several comprehension questions, on how much they had understood of a recording; learning *from* the listening appeared to be of secondary importance. (That the transcripts of the recordings in this particular textbook were only in the teacher's manual was perhaps a manifestation of the book's pedagogic stance.) As a result, those cassettes tapes—in addition to recalling the contrived language voiced by yesteryear's "professional ELT actors" (Thorn, 2012, p. 66)—brought to mind the confused and sometimes reproachful faces of students past and a sense of professional failure at my inability to offer listening as something with real pedagogical value.

It was the Internet, together with a newfound freedom not to have to use a textbook, that changed the teaching of listening for me. I realized that radio programmes I downloaded for my own pleasure could also yield listening material. In the decade or so of using authentic audio (first with MP3 files burnt onto a CD and then, as classrooms became equipped for computer-aided instruction, played directly from a computer), I have become convinced that it can augment university language classes, regardless of the students' English ability.

In this paper, illustrating with actual examples of audio texts, I offer suggestions for using authentic audio in a way that will not overwhelm Japanese students whose prior experience of listening has mostly been limited to the "reduced language" characteristic of many EFL textbooks (Arndt, Harvey, & Nuttall, 2000, p. 13). In particular, I will describe how listening can be developed into something more than a comprehension test and become a springboard for language acquisition activities.

Cutting Samples of Sound

As a boy, I would watch my father in his shop cut small pieces of fabric from bulky rolls for customers who requested samples. Now, as an English teacher, I find myself cutting samples of sound for my students (using editing software, not scissors). The word *SAMPLE* actually serves as a useful acronym with which to describe the characteristics of the audio resources I use and the principles guiding their implementation in the classroom: Short, Authentic, Meaningful, Productive, Listening, Extract. These characteristics are explained below.

Short

I have found that when using authentic audio, short bursts are often most appropriate; most of the clips I use are well under 1 minute. There are several reasons for preferring shorter audio texts: short clips can be easily incorporated into existing lessons, and they can be played several times without students losing concentration. There are, as Rost (2011) pointed out, "known limitations to short-term memory that occur after sixty to ninety seconds of listening—for listeners of all ages and backgrounds" (p. 198). Repeated listening allows learners to adjust, or "normalize" (Field, 2002, p. 243) to the speed and characteristics of the voice(s). Finally, and most importantly for this paper, using short clips leaves time for activities that seek to promote language acquisition. When recordings are overly long, there is a danger that insufficient time will be left to develop the listening beyond a comprehension exercise (as was my experience at that Tokyo language school).

Authentic

One of the key reasons for using authentic audio—that is, audio containing "language where no concessions are made to foreign speakers" (Harmer, 2007, p. 272)—is that it exposes students to English as it is spoken outside of the classroom, to features of natural conversation that just cannot be mimicked in dialogues created at a computer and read in a studio. Authentic material is also often richer in terms of its cultural and linguistic content than concocted texts. In addition, a recording's authentic provenance, if "sold" to the students, can in itself be motivational (Rebuck, 2008).

However, the value of authentic material is by no means accepted by all; indeed, Rost (2011) stated that authenticity is "one of the most controversial issues in the teaching of listening" (p. 165). A cogent criticism of ELT's preoccupation with "real English" was offered by Widdowson (2003) who argued that because "what naturally occurs seldom serves our pedagogic purpose, we need to contrive something that does" (p. 116). While it is certainly true that made-up texts offer a convenient way to model or introduce language features in a systematic way, there

is also no doubt that the Internet can supply plenty of naturally occurring speech that can be made to meet our pedagogic aims. A teacher may have to listen for several hours before a suitable "sound nugget" is found, but for lovers of radio these nuggets come as a by-product of listening they would normally do anyway. Finally, as I illustrate later, authentic and contrived do not have to be mutually exclusive because teacher-created dialogues (extension dialogues) can complement the authentic texts.

Meaningful

Students are motivated by content that is relevant and engaging. Judicious selection by the teacher of authentic audio can provide listening material on issues that will resonate with the learners. In particular, authentic audio can serve to bring to the classroom thought provoking topics that are rarely, if ever, covered in textbooks (see Rebuck, 2012, for an example of a lesson incorporating audio clips from a BBC programme on Down's syndrome).

Productive

Listening should be used to promote language acquisition (Richards, 2008). This acquisition, as Richards explained, can be achieved by means of *noticing* and *restructuring* activities (p. 16). Noticing activities involve using the listening text for raising awareness of the language, while restructuring activities are those that have learners make productive use of all or part of the text.

Regarding noticing, research into second language acquisition suggests that an important step for a learner to acquire language is becoming aware of the differences between his or her present interlanguage and the system of the target language (Schmidt, 1990). However, as McCarthy (1998) stressed, "it is what the target for 'noticing' is that matters most, and if the input is impoverished, there will not be much worth noticing" (p. 68). McCarthy's comment points back to an advantage of authentic material mentioned above: It is often richer than its concocted counterpart.

Listening

The clips are initially presented as audio input, although as will be described later, they lead to various production activities.

Extract

The recordings are usually extracted from a longer piece of spoken text.

SAMPLEs in the Classroom

I use authentic audio clips in most of the lessons of the communicative English course that I teach. Some of these clips have served as the kernels around which I have created completely new lessons, while others, including the two introduced in this paper, have been integrated into existing lessons. The programmes from which the two clips in this paper were taken are, at the time of writing, still available on the BBC Radio 4 website. Readers are encouraged to listen to the recordings; doing so will literally give a voice to the transcribed words (for convenience, the URLs of the programmes and temporal location of each extract are given below the transcripts).

SAMPLE 1: My Last Summer

Listening one evening to a BBC Radio 4 programme, *Woman's Hour*, I heard a moving interview with a woman diagnosed with terminal cancer. I realized that it could serve as a thought-provoking supplement to a *find someone who* activity, a fixture of the first lesson of the autumn semester, that involves students find-

ing out how their classmates spent their summer (see Appendix A). Following this mingle activity I added two prelistening tasks. The first of these, shown in Figure 1, sensitizes students in a general way to the contents of the audio clip and also reviews the use of the unreal conditional.

We've talked about what you did during your summer holidays. Now, imagine that next year's summer holiday will, for some reason, be your last one. Write down three things that you would do during your very last summer. Think of a reason for each of your choices.

Have conversations with your classmates. For example:

A. What would you do during your last summer holiday?

B. That's a really difficult question, but I think I'd go to the Amazon rainforest.

A: Why?

B: Well, it's a place that I've always wanted to see, and if I'm going to die anyway, I wouldn't have to worry about catching any diseases.

Figure 1. Handout Extract 1a, Prelistening Task

The second prelistening task is a dictation that provides necessary background information for the listening. As a listening task itself, the dictation also serves as a warm-up for the authentic audio that follows. After dictating the text (see Figure 2), I display the transcript onto the screen and go through it with the students

Wendy Butler was a high-flying executive in the city, but in February 2011, Wendy, who is 56, was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. She was told by the doctor that her cancer was terminal and that she had between 6 to 12 months to live. In this interview, Wendy is speaking about what she wants to do with each of her three daughters in the time she has left.

Figure 2. Dictation, Prelistening Task

For this audio clip, students are set a while-listening task (see Figure 3), the main aim of which is not so much to test students' comprehension, but rather to direct their attention to the speaker's key points.

Wendy has three daughters, Natalie, Becky, and Melissa. What has Wendy done, or wants to do, with each of her daughters?

Draw a line between the name and the activity

Natalie	go to her wedding
Melissa	go up in a hot air balloon
Becky	go to Wimbledon (to watch the tennis)

Figure 3. Handout Extract 1b, While-Listening Task

After the matching task, students listen to the recording again and attempt the cloze exercise (see Figure 4). The boxed words were those gapped on the actual class cloze handouts and were not chosen randomly. Rather, these words were expected to be in the students' active vocabulary (that is, words that learners understand and use in production), but which, because of changes in pronunciation within and across word boundaries,

are likely to present problems when uttered in a stream of speech. The realization that it is often impossible to catch such simple words when spoken at natural speed is an effective way of making students receptive to follow-up practice on connected speech.

Interviewer: How did you want to spend the time that you have left?

Wendy: It didn't take long to decide because my friends said, "Oh, surely you'll travel as much as you can." I've no intention of travelling anywhere. I didn't want to. I just wanted to spend time with my family and my friends. And, you know, the major things that we wanted to do: Natalie wanted to go to Wimbledon; we went on Tuesday, so she's now been to Wimbledon with me. Um, Becky just wants to go up in a hot air balloon with me, so we're going to do that soon as well. And Melissa, who's getting married next year, really wants me to be at the wedding. Now, that's a tough one because it's a year, you know, it's in 2012, um, but she's determined I'm going to be there, so I've got something to work towards as well.

Figure 4. Audio Transcript 1, Cloze Exercise

Note. Highlighted words are gapped on the actual class handout.
Woman's Hour. (2011, July 1). BBC Radio 4.
Retrieved from http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0124qt7
Location of extract: 7 min 5 sec into programme. *Length of clip*: 50 seconds.

Once the cloze exercise has been checked, students listen to the recording while reading the transcript. Because reading-while-listening does not reflect how people generally listen in the real world, some advocates of communicative language teaching, as Renandya (2012) pointed out, do not consider it sufficiently genuine enough for classroom use. I have, however, found it to be an important step in consolidating students' understanding of what they have heard.

Having matched the sounds to the printed words, students are then taken through the text. I direct students' attention to key features of Wendy's response, including her use of verb tenses and pronoun reference (e.g., What does *one* in *that's a tough one* refer to?). The utterance "I've no intention of travelling . . ." serves as an opportunity for a brief discussion of several noun and preposition combinations followed by a gerund. The audio is played again after the key language features of the audio have been foregrounded and any linguistic difficulties that have arisen have been addressed.

In my classes, postlistening always includes at least two activities to promote language acquisition. Different texts may be more or less suited to a certain activity. For example, because Wendy's speech is rich in contractions, one of the postlistening exercises in this lesson is the *Returning the Contractions* activity described later.

SAMPLE 2: The Thing That Put Me off Offal

The audio clip transcript in Audio Text 2 was integrated into a lesson that had students use the construction *used to* to talk about changes in their lives. Although the clip is from a programme broadcast in 2005, the subject matter is not dated. Preparing authentic material may take some time, but if the material is chosen wisely it can potentially become a permanent item in a teacher's resource bank.

To stimulate interest in the upcoming audio, students ask each other about a food that they *used to* like but do not now (see Figure 5). At this stage, students are also familiarized with the phrasal verb *put off*, which appears in the recording.

a. Is there a food that you **used to like** but don't like now?
b. What put you off eating this food?

Have conversations like this with your partner.

A: Is there a food that you used to like but don't like now?
B: Yes, I used to like *yuuke*, which is a Korean dish of seasoned raw beef topped with an egg yolk, but now I don't eat it.
A: What put you off eating it?
B: Well, recently [in 2011] some people died of food poisoning after eating it.

Figure 5. Handout Extract 2a, Prelistening Task

Students are told prior to the first listening that they will listen to a man who used to like eating kidney but was put off eating it. Before playing the recording, I ask students to guess what put the man off this particular meat and write their ideas on the board. Prediction tasks such as this are "vitally important if we want students to engage fully with the text" (Harmer, 2007, p. 271).

Field (2002) argued that a long prelistening session can be "counterproductive" (p. 243) because it can result in too much of the content of the listening passage being anticipated. This is one of the reasons I often limit my preteaching of vocabulary to a few items; another is that listening "cold" heightens task authenticity by ensuring that students' first exposure to a recording mimics most real-life situations (when I turn on NHK radio in the morning, I am not provided with a list of difficult vocabulary to support my comprehension).

Students listen while checking the board to see whether any of their predictions were correct. For the second listening, students fill in the blanks shown in Audio Text 2 (see Figure 6). As with the first text, the words blanked out are basic ones that students know well but which they may find difficult to distinguish in connected speech.

I think in common with a lot of other people, I haven't always disliked even the idea of offal, really. I remember when I was young, when I was at primary school, you know, I used to like things like liver and kidneys. I think there is just something about being told what these things actually did, that put me off them a bit. There's always that lingering notion at the back of your mind that when you're eating a kidney that the main thing about a kidney - the main thing that it does - is it makes urine. That's going to *put you off*, isn't it? Certainly does me.

Figure 6. Audio Transcript 2, Cloze Exercise

Note. Highlighted words are gapped on the actual class handout.
The Food Programme. (2005, October 2). *BBC Radio 4*. Retrieved from http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/factual/foodprogramme_20051002.shtml
Location of clip: 36 seconds into programme. *Length of clip*: 29 seconds.

Mining the Text

Authentic recordings are not only a challenge to the students; they also present a never-ending test of the teacher's language awareness. A teacher with poor explicit understanding of the target language may find little to "mine" or extract from the texts, whereas one with more extensive linguistic knowledge should notice whole seams of language to exploit.

In Audio Transcript 2, there is much that can be highlighted for the students, as the following examples show:

- The use of connected speech (e.g., the reduction of *and* to the letter *n* in *liver 'n kidneys*). It is worth stressing here the need for teachers to have a basic knowledge of phonetics, particu-

larly features of connected speech such as elision, intrusion, and assimilation. This will augment a teacher's intuition when deciding which words to use for the cloze activity. It is often the case, as has been pointed out (Kelly, 2000, p. 113), that simply making students aware of the existence of connected speech features can contribute greatly to improving their understanding of natural speech.

- The intonation on the tag question *That's going to put you off, isn't it?*
- The use of ellipsis and substitution in *Certainly does me* (this utterance shows ellipsis of the dummy subject *it* and substitution of the phrasal verb in the preceding sentence with the auxiliary verb *do*). To deepen their understanding of the text, students can be asked to recover the full meaning of such constructions.
- The fact that, while phrasal verbs are idiomatic, their meaning is rooted to some extent in the core meaning of the component parts. The core meaning of *put* is to "move or place something in a particular position," while that of *off* is "away from the place in question." Thus, in the context of this audio, the speaker's learning that kidneys make urine caused his previous liking for kidney to be "put away from him."

Postlistening: Exploiting the Audio Text for Acquisition

Mining the text for language serves to raise students' awareness of key linguistic features. Such noticing activities are an important part of acquiring language from listening. However, Swain's (1985) output hypothesis would suggest that if retention of the language to which students have listened is to be achieved, it is also important that they actually produce the language. A number of activities that engage students in productive use of the audio text are described next.

Reading the Audio Script in Pairs

This can be done with a monologue, as in Audio Transcript 2, but often works best with conversations such as that between the presenter and a caller on a phone-in programme.

Extension Dialogues

Teachers can write dialogues that incorporate elements of the authentic text. Such dialogues give students a chance to use in a more controlled way some of the vocabulary and structures in the audio text. Appendix B contains the extension dialogue that complements Audio Transcript 1, as well as accompanying language-focus questions. In more advanced classes, students could create their own dialogues based, perhaps quite loosely, on the audio transcript.

Retelling

With short monologues in particular, students can be asked to note down a certain number of key words from the text and then try to retell what the speaker said. Nation and Newton (2009) pointed out that this kind of retelling is "one of the most effective ways of bringing receptive language knowledge into productive use" (p. 118).

Another kind of retelling is *Mountain Word-Climbing*. Students choose around 10 words from the audio text and write them on the slope of a mountain outline drawn on a piece of paper or on the board. Students then use these key words as lexical footholds to retell the text to their partner or to the class. Swain (1985) proposed that output is more likely to lead to acquisition when learners are pushed towards delivering a message in an accurate and coherent manner. The teacher providing error feedback after an initial word-climb and asking students to repeat

the activity is one way to nudge learners to raise the accuracy of their output.

Returning the Contractions

A transcript with all the contracted forms written in full is displayed on the screen. A student can then be called to the computer to change the full forms back to the contractions used by the speaker.

Shadowing

All or part of the audio text is used for shadowing practice.

Moth-Eaten Sentences

The idea for this activity came from the *mushikui eibun* method on "*Nyuzu de Eikaiwa* [English Conversation Through the News]" on NHK Television. The class first reads an extract from the audio transcript placed on a PowerPoint slide (Slide 1 in Figure 7). On the second slide some words have been deleted. Students then recall the missing words as they read the sentence aloud. This continues until reconstruction of most of the text becomes the students' job (Slide 5 in Figure 7).

Slide 1: I used to like things like liver and kidney, but finding out what these organs actually do, put me off eating them.

* * * * *

Slide 5: I [ ] [ ] like things [ ] [ ] and [ ] [ ] finding [ ] what these [ ] [ ] do, [ ] me [ ] eating [ ].

Figure 7. Sample PowerPoint Slides for Moth-Eaten Sentences Activity

Chunk Shadowing

A feature of unplanned spoken language is that it is often formed from small chunks rather than from the kind of sentences produced by writers of textbook dialogues. These chunks, as Shigenori, Yoshiaki, and Hajime (2006, p. 191) explained, tend to be demarcated by a pause as the speaker takes a breath. To raise awareness of chunking, students can first be asked to insert a slash [/] on the transcript each time they hear the speaker pause. Next, each pause-unit chunk is presented on a separate PowerPoint slide. Students read each slide as soon as it appears on the screen. This is repeated several times with the speed of progression through the slides increasing each time.

Conclusion

With a little creativity on the part of the teacher, clips of authentic audio can be slotted into existing lessons or provide the inspiration and nucleus for new ones. The rapid rate and sound changes that characterize much natural spoken English can certainly be challenging for learners; however, when the audio is presented in a form that is manageable—that is, in short clips—and when it is used as a springboard for language exploration and acquisition, authentic audio can represent a valuable resource, even in lower level classes.

A few points, however, should be borne in mind when considering the activities introduced in this paper. Firstly, intensive analysis of the transcript may leave students with the impression that complete understanding of a text is necessary to catch what is being said. They may need to be reminded that full comprehension of every word is rarely required in real-world listening situations. Secondly, although students gain a thorough understanding of a particular lesson's audio script, it is uncertain to what extent mastering one recording will make it easier for learners to cope with the next. Perhaps an explicit focus

on listening strategies could help develop more transferrable listening skills. Siegel's (2012) Process-Based Listening Instruction, which involves teachers narrating the thought processes they engage in as they listen, so as to provide frameworks that students can emulate, could provide some valuable pointers for augmenting the teaching of SAMPLEs.

Bio Data

Mark Rebuck has been teaching English in Japanese universities for over a decade. He holds an MA in Japanese studies from Sheffield University and an MA in TEFL from Birmingham University. <reebuk67@yahoo.co.jp>

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Appendix A

The "Find Someone Who . . ." Activity Preceding SAMPLE 1

During the summer vacation, did you . . .	A follow up question I asked
1. study English either by yourself or at a language school?	
2. miss anything about university life?	
3. see a great movie?	
4. travel to somewhere either in Japan or abroad?	
5. experience something that made you rethink your values or change how you live, even in a small way?	
6. change your appearance in some way?	
7. feel some strong emotion in reaction to a story in the news?	
8. do something that you regret?	
9. do something that you are proud of?	
10. eat something really delicious?	

Appendix B

Extract from Class Handout: Extension Dialogue for SAMPLE 2 with Focus-on-Language Questions.

Read the **extension dialogue** below and answer the questions that follow. At the beginning of next week's lesson you will practice the dialogue in pairs.

John and Peter are in a London restaurant. They are looking at the menu and deciding what to order.

John: It's been ages since I've been to a restaurant serving traditional English food. I think I'll have the set lunch, the steak and kidney pie. Do you want the same?

Peter: No, thanks. I'm **not too keen on offal**, especially kidney[1].

John: Really. Have you always disliked it?

Peter: No, when I was at primary school, I **would**[2] always ask for seconds when steak and kidney pie was served for school lunch, but I stopped eating it when I was around 12.

John: Did something in particular **put you off it**[3]?

Peter: Yes, I went off eating it after a biology lesson when we were taught about what the kidneys do.

John: So, you're saying that learning that the kidneys make urine put you off steak and kidney pie.

Peter: That's right. I did try to eat it a few times after that lesson, but I couldn't help associating the lumps of kidney on my plate with what the kidneys do in the body. The **lingering**[4] notion that kidneys make urine just made me lose my appetite.

John: Seeing that you find *offal* so *awful*, perhaps you should go for the fish and chips. I'm just going to catch the waiter's eye[5].

Answer the following language-focus questions

1. Is there a difference between the expressions *I'm not too keen on offal* and *I don't like offal*? If so, what?
2. Is there any difference between the expressions *I always* ***used to*** *ask for seconds* and *I* ***would*** *always ask for seconds*? If so, what?
3. Many phrasal verbs have a single verb equivalent; for example, "the teacher *handed out* the copies" could be re-written as "the teacher *distributed* the copies." Write a single verb equivalent for *put off* as it is used in the dialogue.
4. The verb *to linger* is often used with smell. What kind of smells linger? Write two below. Do a Google search to check your ideas (you could used the following sentence for your search: "the smell of* lingered").
5. What is the meaning of the idiom *to catch somebody's eye*?
6. Apart from *to put off*, there are two other phrasal verbs in the dialogue. Write them below and give the meaning of each one in English and/or Japanese. Remember that some phrasal verbs have multiple meanings, so be sure that the meaning you write is the one that fits the context of the dialogue.