Extensive Listening: Using Authentic Materials

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Through extensive listening (EL) language learners can increase their listening proficiency by having exposure to large numbers of aural texts. Benefits of EL include naturalistic language acquisition, better coping with speech rate, and increase in aural word recognition. However, EL is underutilized and underresearched, and currently there are few graded materials available for EL. Consequently, many learners use authentic materials from the Internet. Advantages of using authentic input include exposure to connected speech, realistic examples of spoken grammars, and natural intonation. However, authentic materials cause problems for learners, such as fatigue, difficulties with idiomatic language, and difficulties with connected speech. In response to these needs and limitations, we set up an EL component in our EFL courses. In this paper, we describe the theoretical decisions informing our approach, the technology used to manage the program, the data used to monitor progress and advise students, and students' reported coping strategies.

言語学習者は多聴（EL）を通して大量の聴解教材に接する事で聴解力を高める事ができる。ELは自然な言語習得や発話速度へのより良い対処法や口述の語彙認識力の向上に役立つが、十分に活用や研究がされてなく、レベル別に利用できる教材はあまり現存しない。その結果、多くの学習者はインターネットでオーセンティックな教材を利用している。オーセンティックなインプットを使用する利点は、連続発音や会話文法の実例や自然なイントネーションに触れられる事だが、一方で学習者は、例えば疲労や連続発音や母語話者が自然に使う言語の難しさの様な問題に直面する。これらのニーズや限界に応える為、我々はEFLコースでEL要素を組成した。本論文では、我々のアプローチの基になった論理的事項、ELプログラムに対応する為の技術、学生の進歩やアドバイスをモニターしたデータや学生から実際に報告のあった対処策について述べている。

Considering that developing good L2 listening skills is considered a critical part of language learning (Rost, 2002; Vandergrift, 2007), and that massive amounts of L2 input are needed for successful L2 acquisition (Ellis, 2005) we believe extensive listening (EL) should be a part of any Japanese university's EFL curriculum. EL involves massive amounts of aural input, subjective enjoyment, and comfort or ease with respect to the level of listening difficulty (Renandya, 2011; Rixon, 1986; Waring, 2008). Additionally, EL is not concerned with drawing attention to details, vocabulary, or form, but rather places fluency, meaning, and understanding ahead of all else. Few, if any, prelistening tasks are needed, and follow-up questions and tasks are not a major part of EL; however, these questions and tasks may provide a measure of accountability, motivation, and purpose if undertaken in a classroom setting.

In natural listening, unlike in the other receptive skill of reading, there is no going back to replay what is heard. Therefore, coping with speech rate is a crucial listening skill and an important benefit of EL (Renandya, 2011). Other positive effects are thought to include: aiding cognitive mapping, expansion of listening vocabulary, better familiarity with connected speech, and a boost in language confidence (Renandya, 2011; Renandya & Farrell, 2011; Waring, 2008).

Despite these benefits, finding and selecting materials for EL is problematic. In extensive reading (ER)—as opposed to EL—readers can select from a wide range of graded materials designed to suit readers with varying levels of language ability. However, graded resources for listening are not widely available, so course designers, teachers, and students may resort to using authentic, nongraded materials from the Internet to carry out EL.

Advantages of using an authentic text include the introduction of (a) aspects of natural speech that become distorted when a text is slowed down, such as assimilation, reductions, blending, and elisions, and (b) content that disappears when speech is carefully scripted, such as less standard grammar, more colloquial language, cognates, false starts, back channel cues, vaguer language, and self-corrections (see Brown, 2011; Rost, 2002). However, in practical terms, using unscripted texts could leave the learner exposed to texts that are filled with difficult vocabulary, grammar, and content. Additionally, difficult vocabulary, or even simple vocabulary, may become far more complicated when a text is spoken in an unfamiliar accent (Ur, 2002).

The speed of an authentic text may also lead to problems. Firstly, words and sounds change from their dictionary pronunciations in isolation as they are uttered at natural speed within a group of other words (Brown, 2011; Rost, 2002). Secondly, the amount of time needed to process information means that as listeners process information they hear, they are likely to miss following chunks of information (Rost, 1990). Also, according to Broersma and Cutler (2008), at speed, word boundaries (where a word ends and the next word begins) may be wrongly guessed, leading to a word being incorrectly identified.

Finally, the length of a text may cause problems for learners, so that even when a text is at a reasonable speed and not too difficult in terms of vocabulary and grammar, over the duration of a long text, learners are unable to focus their attention due to fatigue from focusing on various aspects of the text (see Ur, 2002).

In response to the need for EL in language programs and the unavailability of graded materials, we set up an EL component that trains students in how to self-select appropriate materials for EL in an EFL course in a Japanese university. In this paper, we describe the theoretical background we used for developing the EL process, the approach we derived to train students to select texts, the technology we used to manage the program, the data we used to monitor students' progress and advise students, and the coping strategies that students reported.

Setting

The study took place in an intermediate level, multi-skill, mandatory general-English course in an international university in southern Japan with 3,235 domestic (Japanese) students and 2,420 international students from 78 different countries. The majority of students in the course had completed elementary and pre-intermediate level English classes, although a small number of students had matriculated directly into the intermediate course by attaining a paper-based TOEFL score in the 460-479 range. The majority of students were Japanese, but a small number of Korean and Chinese students (fluent in Japanese) studied English alongside their Japanese counterparts and their responses are also included in the data. Classes numbered 20-22

students and were conducted four times a week on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. The EL component was trialled in four classes, with a total of 80 students.

Methodological Considerations

Choosing Texts: Authentic or Accessible?

In order to cope with the practical disadvantages of using authentic texts and the lack of graded materials, Steve Brown's (2011) advice concerning text selection was useful. Brown defines *authentic* as matching the needs of the learner rather than the source of the text. As such, a scripted conversation that was very realistic in mimicking a real-life conversation (such as a script for ordering food at McDonald's) would be justifiably authentic in line with the needs of the learners using the script. In addition to this description of authentic, the EL program designers noted that, as a point of comparison, ER programs are carried out with materials that are carefully scripted to be accessible to students. Furthermore, we also noted that there are many examples of L1 learners learning their first language with "carefully scripted" input, such as when parents speak slowly and simply to their young children in order for them to understand. Therefore, we decided on the following definition of authentic listening materials:

> Any text that is freely accessible on the Internet and does not have to be doctored by the student's teacher (in terms of speed or difficulty) to make it appropriate for EL. Text is selected by the student for maximum enjoyment.

Guidelines to help students select text were adapted from Waring's (2008) advice on EL:

1. The learner should be able to understand 90% or more of the content.
2. The learner should understand more than 95% of the vocabulary and grammar.
3. The learner should be able to listen to the text without pausing and replaying portions of the text.
4. The learner should glean enjoyment from doing the listening.

Methodology

EL (like ER) requires a lot of time. Therefore, one of the principal goals of this program was to develop an out-of-class listening habit that would be continued after the semester had finished. To this end, the course was designed to train students to become autonomous listeners. The principles behind this approach were derived from past experiences, whereby giving learners too much freedom too soon in their listening activities did not successfully encourage students to consistently engage in listening activities week in and week out (see Ducker, 2013). Furthermore, Murphey (2003) argued that effective teachers engage in three stages of autonomous development: firstly, maintaining tight control in an autocratic environment; secondly, allowing students some decision making (a democratic environment); and finally, giving students complete control and responsibility for their learning in a laissez-faire environment. Following these principles, students in stage 1 of the program were introduced to resources for listening and the steps required to complete listening activities while being closely directed and monitored by the teacher. Each class's teacher found a text (either audio or video) and developed a simple worksheet that required the students to discern the topic and three key ideas from the text (see Appendix A). The key ideas were required in order to have students focus on the general message of the text rather than on small details. The teacher also supplied three very simple comprehension questions in order to boost students' confidence

in listening and help the teacher check that students were carrying out the listening activities. After this, the teacher wrote three discussion questions to be used the following day in class to help students develop their understanding of the text and topic. In the following class, the teacher replayed the audio file, and students compared their answers in groups and carried on the discussion as a warm-up. These listening activities were repeated daily with a new text every day for 2 weeks.

Stage 2 of the EL program was focused on self-access to listening texts and developing a self-managed listening habit without needing constant teacher supervision. To this end, students were divided into groups so that they would learn to be responsible to provide their group with a piece of homework for each night of the week. Groups had four or five members and were organized according to their scores on class-based listening tests (a separate part of the language program). Students were given a 90-minute class to find an audio file or video file and then use a blank template of the worksheet (see Appendix B) to create the listening homework worksheets as the teacher had done in stage 1 of the program. In order to organize their homework schedule, students were given a copy of a monthly calendar and instructed to negotiate within groups who would be responsible for each day's worksheet. Homework files were shared with team members and, for each day of the week, all students in the team completed the same piece of homework in time to return to class and hold the discussion the following day. After the first week of stage 2, all worksheet creation was intended to be done as homework. Stage 2 lasted 2 or 3 weeks, depending on the teacher's satisfaction with completion rates.

Stage 3 involved students practicing independent listening, while still having the framework of the classroom to support and encourage EL habits. Students were instructed to carry out a listening activity and write a very simple summary of the key points of the listening that they would use to explain to their teammates what they had listened to for homework. Students then were instructed to write three discussion questions to use to conduct a short discussion with their teammates in the following class. Each student completed independent homework for each day of class. Students continued stage 3 of the EL program for the remainder of the semester.

In each stage of the program, students were required to be able to share their answers to the homework and join the discussion in each class. As such, students needed to be able to access their homework during class time. This could be done by making notes to bring to class, by printing the completed worksheet and bringing it to class, by taking a photo of the completed section of the worksheets with a smartphone, or even by accessing worksheets online using their smartphones.

Accessing and Sharing Materials

One of two media was selected by the teachers to share homework worksheets and listening texts: Google Drive or Facebook.

Google Drive

Google Drive allows users to create documents and store these and other content (such as documents similar to word files and video files) online. Every document created in a Google Drive is a webpage. The creator of a document can then give access to this webpage to other users by *sharing* the file with them. Sharing creates a link between one user's account and another user's account. This sharing can be done with multiple users, as long as the users' account names (the same as their email addresses) are known.

The first step in using Google Drive was to have students create a Google account. In order that teachers could always identify which student was contacting them, students were in-

structed to create an identifiable account name using the following formula: firstname.lastname.universityname@gmail.com.

Students were then shown how to create folders in Google Drive and to create a folder with their name and class code. This folder was then shared with the teacher's email address and the teacher made a class folder with the teacher examples, blank worksheets, and a link to access each student's folder. As the students had shared their folders with the teacher, any work placed inside students' folders was automatically accessible to the teacher.

In the students' folders, students were instructed to create a subfolder for their listening homework. The listening subfolder was then further divided into subfolders for each month (see Figure 1).

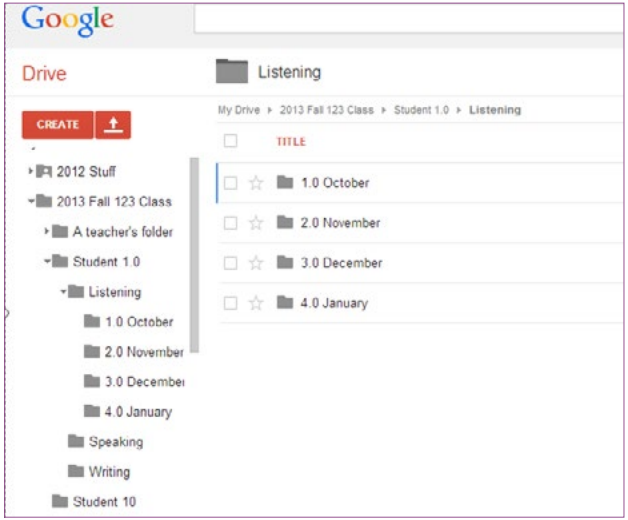

Figure 1. A teacher's Google Drive, with students' folders included.

Once students' Google Drive folders were organized, the teacher shared the first piece of listening homework. For each text, the title included the words *listening homework* and the date in the format yyyy/mm/dd. By doing so, files were automatically sorted in the student folder in the order that they were created. In order to share the files, the document was selected in the folder, then, with the right mouse button, the user clicked once to access an option menu (see Figure 2).

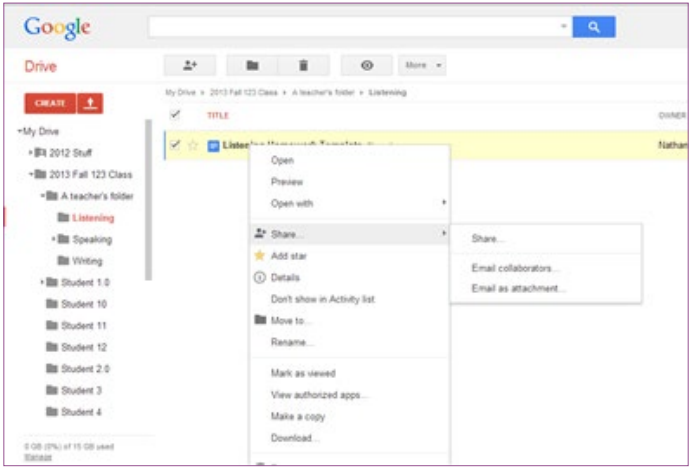

Figure 2. A function menu with sharing function.

The procedure for sharing homework worksheets required that the teacher share the folder in a noneditable, "view only" format (see Figure 3), because if one student had edited the teacher's original file, it would have been altered for all of the students.

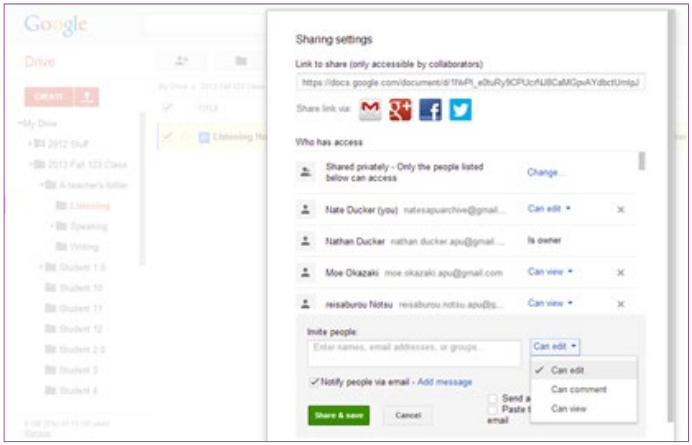

Figure 3. Sharing options in Google Drive.

Once shared, the document was then viewable in each student's own account in a folder called "Shared with me," which is automatically created in all Google Drive accounts. Students had to make a copy of the homework file and drag this file into their own listening homework folder in the correct month.

As the listening program moved into stage 2, students needed to make sure that they knew their group members' email addresses from their Google accounts. Then, once they had created a worksheet, they needed to follow the same procedures as their teacher had previously done and share their "view only" worksheet with their team. Again, group members made a copy of the worksheet that they could edit and then moved it to their listening folder in the correct monthly folder.

In the final stages of the listening program, students continued to listen independently. Therefore, there was no need for them to share files with their classmates. Instead, students placed their summaries and follow-up discussion questions into the monthly folders for the teacher to check.

Facebook

Facebook also provided an easy means of sharing documents and links as well as setting up groups within a class. The teacher first set up a class-wide group and added all members of the class (see Figures 4 and 5).

Figure 4. Creating a group in Facebook.

Figure 5. Class-wide group in Facebook.

For those without Facebook accounts or for those who did not want to use their personal Facebook accounts, it was easy to create a new account as homework for use in class. A link was posted to the group allowing them to click to the listening, and a worksheet was attached to the same message (see Figure 6), which students downloaded, completed, printed, and brought to class for use in warm-up discussions.

Figure 6. Sharing links to listening texts and homework sheets in Facebook groups.

For stage 2, students were divided in groups of four. For each group of students, the teacher created the group and invited members. In a micro-version of the bigger class-wide group, students provided links to listening texts for one another and posted worksheets that the other group members did as homework. As the creator of the groups, the teacher was also a member and could easily follow the progress of the students. Discussions were still held at the beginning of the class, each group being led by whoever provided the listening for that day.

For stage 3, although students could work alone, Facebook still played a useful role as students could create their own listening groups and continue their discussions online. Students were encouraged to continue working in this autonomous manner throughout and beyond the semester.

Alternative Possibilities: Learning Management Systems and Paper-Based Version

As an alternative to Google Docs or Facebook, an LMS such as Blackboard or a discussion board could be used in a similar way. In trials using Blackboard, there were some issues with flexibility and notification, though the activities could be carried out. Specifically, setting up separate discussions and creating groups was cumbersome and students weren't notified of changes and updates within the LMS webpage or by email, both of which are optional benefits of Google Drive and Facebook. Also, using a paper-based version of the worksheets was piloted and worked well in terms of having something physical to use in class. The main problem then arose in the sharing of links to the audio files, as well as losing a digital "paper-trail" of the groups' progress and participation. Another popular LMS is Moodle, but as this alternative was not available, it was not trialled.

Results and Discussion

To evaluate the EL texts and advise students on how to adjust their study behaviours, a short weekly survey was delivered in stage 2 of the EL component. Firstly, we asked how much of a text students thought they could understand. When it was clear that students did not reach the 90% understanding threshold, they were directed to less demanding texts (e.g., simpler language, less difficult topics, shorter in length, or slower) or EL texts that matched their interests better. This formative feedback ensured students had appropriate texts for EL.

Secondly, we checked the number of times students listened to a text (see Table 1). This was an indicator of how well they understood the text and, again, how well suited the text was to their level of ability (i.e., a smaller number of repetitions could show quicker understanding and more suitable text selection). Results indicated that students became better able to choose texts suited to their own EL needs as the program progressed. The average number of repeated listenings decreased significantly at the $p < .05$ level during the course of the program, as reported by a one-way analysis of variance ($F_{(3,378)} = 5.684$, $p = .001$). Specifically, a Scheffe post hoc test showed that week 1 differed from both weeks 3 and 4.

Table 1. Average Number of Listening Attempts by Week

Week	*N*	Average number of listening attempts	*SD*
1	105	2.90	1.73
2	99	2.38	1.35
3	88	2.23	1.17
4	87	2.13	1.32

Third, we noted any problems that students had in completing their EL homework (see Table 2). Comprehension was the

most frequently reported problem for students. The reasons for their incomprehension were not specifically reported by many; however, unknown vocabulary and speed of speech were cited as problems that students came across. While most reported problems did not increase or decrease consistently over time, vocabulary problems were reported less as the program progressed. Further investigation may reveal if students had become more adept at choosing appropriate texts, were becoming more proficient in using context to guess the meaning of unknown words, or got used to ignoring words they did not know. Technical and group issues were most frequent in weeks 2 and 3, while weeks 1 and 4 had almost no reported cases of such problems. This may be an artifact of the growing pains that groups experienced moving from a teacher-controlled situation to a more autonomous situation and then becoming accustomed to the group dynamic by week 4. This effect is something akin to Tukman's (1963) model of small group development: forming, storming, norming, and performing.

Table 2. Problems with the EL Program Reported by Students, by Week

Problem	Week				Total count	As a percentage
	1	2	3	4		
General comprehension	59	26	29	52	166	44%
Vocabulary	19	13	8	4	44	12%
Technical or group issues	1	6	8	0	15	4%
Speed	2	4	1	2	9	2%
Details	2	2	1	3	8	2%
No problem reported	20	41	38	35	134	36%

When comparing the responses of students from week to week during the program, coping strategies did not shift frequencies over time (see Table 3). While repeating the text and the combination of repeating and dictionary use made up the bulk of the coping strategies used, other strategies included talking to friends, shadowing, reading the script, predicting, and giving up. This definitely merits further investigation because as students gained more experience with EL, we expected them to adapt their coping strategies, which in turn may affect their text-source selection.

Table 3. All Coping Strategies Reported by Students

Coping strategy	Count	As a percentage
Repeat text & use dictionary	114	30%
Repeat text	113	30%
Use dictionary	22	6%
Other	8	2%
No coping strategy needed / given	122	32%

Finally, we made a note of the websites students used. Surprisingly, only eight different sites were used. Considering the numbers of students involved and the repeated daily listenings, we had expected a much wider variety of interests and therefore that a wider variety of websites would have been accessed. Possible explanations include (a) students may have interpreted our instructions as recommending a particular site, while our intention was to show it as an example; or (b) students were opting to save time when selecting a listening text by using a known site. Alternatively, students' search strategies should have been developed to help them find texts that were more interesting to them. Finally, students may have felt constrained by the need to find a text appropriate for a group rather than pursuing their

own interests. This would put an important constraint on the effectiveness of the group stages in helping promote EL.

Table 4. The Most Popular Websites Used by Students for EL

Website	Number of uses	As a percentage
www.elllo.org	141	76%
www.youtube.com	14	8%
www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/	12	6%
www.ted.com	8	4%
www.esl-lab.com/	7	4%
www.voanews.com	4	2%
www.pbs.org	1	<1%
www.nationalgeographic.com	1	<1%

Limitations

EL is very much in its infancy and this work highlights the need for more data gathering in many areas such as text selection and coping strategies to help students develop EL habits. While we were able to use students' reports of percentage of text comprehended and number of listenings to help guide students in text selection, we were limited in our understanding of the problems that students were encountering and their subsequent coping strategies. To resolve these issues, two forms of data collection need to be further pursued. Firstly, we need to develop introspective protocols to deeply understand what issues students are facing in comprehending their texts and their subsequent coping mechanisms. Furthermore, we need to develop a case-study approach to track individual students' progress across a semester (or even longer) to find out how students' listening proficiency and listening processing skills develop through EL. We also need to be able to evaluate whether the EL program has any long-term effects on students' overall language proficiency or language study behaviours.

Conclusion

A lack of graded materials creates an important obstacle to carrying out EL activities in EFL programs. One possible response is to train students to find accessible texts online and to use either Google Drive or Facebook to share them, in an attempt to develop autonomous listening habits. Data collection concerning student-reported comprehension and number of reported listenings was used to help guide students in their text selections—with indications that this was effective in promoting EL at an appropriate level over time. Beyond the immediate study, the implications of our findings are that a much deeper introspective and longitudinal study would help provide more concrete advice as to text selection and better guidance to students as to how to cope with listening problems. Finally, such further data collection concerning the types of problems and coping strategies would definitely help guide the development of graded materials in terms of grading vocabulary, speed, length, accents, and content of texts.

Bio Data

At the time of writing, **Nathan Ducker** was a lecturer at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University. He currently works as an Assistant Professor at Miyazaki Municipal University teaching intercultural communication and English skills classes. His research areas include willingness to communicate, extensive listening, and formative assessment in curriculum design. He is currently studying for a PhD at Aston University (UK) investigating willingness to communicate with Japanese EFL students. <nathanducker@gmail.com>

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Appendix A

Teacher Developed Worksheet

Weekend Listening Homework

Please type your name here:

Please type the date here:

Please paste the URL (www....) here: http://esl.about.com/library/media/audio/plans.mp3

What is the topic of your listening?

Planning a night out

What are three key ideas in your listening text?

1. where to go / what to do
2. how to get there
3. checking and confirming

Please answer the comprehension questions about this listening:

1. Why does she not want to go to the cinema?

2. What are the alternatives to the cinema?

3. What is the best way to go, why is this the best way?

Was this difficult? Why or why not?

Please write three discussion questions that you can talk about this topic in class with your team members:

1. What kind of things do you like to do with your friends when you hang out?
2. In Beppu, what are the best ways to get around and meet your friends?
3. What are some good things to do in the evenings in your hometown? How do you go there? Is it cheap or expensive to go out in your hometown?

Appendix B

Blank Worksheet

Listening Homework

Name:

Date:

URL (http://www...):

Topic of listening:

Briefly summarize the listening:

Make three comprehension questions (e.g., who, what, when, where, why, how…) about your listening. (You don't have to answer your questions, just make them.)

1.

2.

3.

Was this listening easy or difficult? Why?

Write three discussion questions to ask your group.

1.

2.

3.